

JAERO Holds Symposium Commemorating Atomic Energy Day

On November 7, the Japan Atomic Energy Relations Organization (JAERO) held a symposium in Asahi Hall in the Yurakucho area of Tokyo, entitled “Fifty Years since the Geneva International Conference.” A panel discussion was conducted, with two journalists, a scientist, and a young celebrity exchanging opinions on the future of Japan’s peaceful utilization of nuclear energy.

The symposium was supposed to have kicked off with a keynote address by former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, who contributed greatly to the development of Japan’s nuclear energy program in its infancy, but as he had fallen ill, his remarks were read by Diet Member Takuji Yanagimoto instead.

In his remarks, Nakasone said that Japan’s nuclear energy policies, which were first incorporated in the national budget in 1954, were characterized by three principles serving as important starting points: (1) its nature as a long-term national policy, (2) the securing of legal and budget-mechanism guarantees, and (3) the selection of truly talented scholars. In 1955, he attended the United Nations International Conference on the Peaceful Utilization of Atomic Energy, flying to Geneva for that purpose, and spoke of his reminiscences of the heated debates carried out in the hotel at that time by Japanese parliamentarians of different party stripes, wearing just their casual clothes.



Afterwards, Nakasone talked about the promotion of “bold policies without any hint of bureaucratic influence,” including the establishment of the Science and Technology Agency (STA), and eight laws passed by the Diet dealing with nuclear energy. He also mentioned the budget allocations given to nuclear energy and the salary schedules of researchers, and how those efforts were later inherited by the Long-term Plan for the Research, Development and Utilization of Atomic Energy. He said that politicians from that period, including himself, contributed to the nation by devoting themselves early on to nuclear energy policies, having looked at the “bigger picture” when making their judgments. Talking about the future, Nakasone revealed his determination to return the fruits of research to the people, while preventing excessive interference by politicians, and ensuring close partnership with journalists.



Blog queen Manabe (left) and Ikawa

Following that, a panel discussion was held on the theme of the future of nuclear energy utilization, featuring four panelists: Yojiro Ikawa, editorial board member of the Yomiuri Shimbun, science writer Kaoru Takeuchi, Prof. Hajimu Yamana of Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, and the celebrity Kaori Manabe, known as the “queen of blogs” in Japan.

Prof. Yamana cited several advantages of nuclear power – including its lack of CO2 emissions, its sustainability, and its stability – adding that it currently accounted for about one-third of Japan’s electricity supply. Yomiuri

Shimbun's Ikawa called attention to the difficulties faced in the promotion of nuclear power, entangled in political ideologies as it is. Writer Takeuchi spoke of his experiences during a huge blackout while in the United States, drawing the following lesson: "One only realizes the value of something once it is lost." He raised the issue of NPP siting as an example of the conflict between global and local perspectives.

In a discussion on the best ways of carrying out communication, Prof. Yamana spoke of his self-criticism and soul-searching from the standpoint of a scientist, saying, "It is necessary to relate things to the average public in an easy-to-understand way, and the failure to take such action has caused a lack of trust." Blog queen Manabe then stressed the need to create a mindset in which misunderstandings never occur "word for word," and said that "real things" were key to prevent the loss of trust. She pointed out that those in charge of NPPs needed to actively show that "they, too, live as normal human beings," and that their doing so might lead to an improved understanding of NPPs on the part of the public.

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