

Meeting for Opinion Exchange Held In Niigata

On November 17, the policy evaluation task force of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) held a meeting in Niigata City to solicit opinions on the theme of “evaluating policies concerning guarantees related to the peaceful utilization of nuclear energy.” Some 180 people participated, with a wide variety of opinions raised on such issues as the pros and cons of Japan's arming itself with nuclear weapons, as well as the safety of nuclear power plants (NPPs). Many people felt that a greater effort should be made to appeal to both domestic and foreign audiences about Japan's thorough commitment to the peaceful utilization of nuclear energy as well as the transparency of its plutonium utilization.

After Chairman Shunsuke Kondo of the AEC explained the aim of the meeting, representatives from the Cabinet Office explained the current state of Japan's policies, with three experts then delivering their opinions. Mikiko Kasahara, representative of the Niigata Women's Council, introduced as “the voice of the region” the argument that people were anxious about nuclear power because of the aging of reactors and earthquake-resistance problems, saying it was necessary to debate whether all NPPs should be shut down so as to ascertain their safety.



Next, Takao Komachi, editorial board member of the Niigata-Nippo News, pointed out the gap between the Japanese and foreign awareness about peaceful utilization, calling for the AEC to strive to dispel the suspicions held by the international community about Japan's intentions. Finally, perennial anti-nuclear activist Hideo Ban, co-representative of the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, said that not only the military but also the peaceful utilization of nuclear power should be abandoned, pointing out the growing “gray zone” that exceeds the bounds of peaceful utilization.

The opinions raised by the audience included the comment by one person who said, “Nuclear power is also necessary from an economic perspective, and I strongly urge that a proper explanation be made to domestic and foreign audiences about that, including the utilization of plutonium.” Someone else said, “I'd like for there to be clear and easy-to-understand information provided about anti-aging measures.” Meanwhile, another person cited the necessity to create a framework that “does not arouse suspicions abroad about Japan's arming itself with nuclear weapons.” One member of the audience suggested that the policy discussions by the AEC perhaps “lacked a sense of balance between pro and con positions.” Someone else said that “it is important to stress the point that nuclear power is effective against global warming,” while another audience member said that “it is necessary to devise a method by which the amount of plutonium is not increased.” One other person pointed out that “enhanced security needs to be implemented around nuclear energy installations.”

The AEC will produce a report on policy evaluation taking into consideration the opinions heard at the meeting this time.

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