

Statement of Opinion (by Rikuro Suzuki)

I am one of the plaintiffs. My name is Rikuro Suzuki.

In 1957, more than 60 years ago, I left my hometown in the countryside of Iwate Prefecture, to work at a steel company in Kawasaki, a coastal city in Kanagawa Prefecture. I think that "environmental pollution" was not a term commonly known then, but even at that time, the air in the Kawasaki coastal area (Keihin Industrial Zone) was polluted, and soot and odd smells from the factories permeated the town. In 1967, I started working in Yokosuka, and in 1998, I moved there. Since then I still live there.

My nephew — my eldest brother's eldest son — developed asthma living in Tokyo while he was a university student for only four years, making him one of the patients officially certified as suffering from a pollution-related illness in Tokyo. That was around 1975, I believe. He returned to the countryside after graduation, but did not get better. He was constantly going in and out of the hospital, even had his throat dissected and an artificial respirator inserted at some point. The last time he was hospitalized was three years ago. He was having severe series of fits, and his body, weakened by the long struggle with the disease, could not go on any longer. Soon after, he passed away at 62 years old. No one lives forever, but still I cannot bear thinking about the sorrow of my brother and his wife of losing their son. Even now I still tear up when I remember them telling their son to no longer suffer any more.

It was around that time I came to know about the Yokosuka coal-fired power plant project. The old existing power plants had been in longterm planned shut down for almost 20 years. Although some of the units were recommissioned in the past for a short time, all went out of operation five years ago. Compared to Kawasaki and Tokyo, Yokosuka's air seems very clean. However, occasionally invisible photochemical oxidants warnings are issued and emission of PM2.5 is not a level at which we can feel at ease. The situation is still under improvement.

If a large-scale coal-fired power plant were to be built, the air that finally cleaned up would once again become polluted, and health issues like asthma would become a concern. I strongly believed that no one should have to go through the same kind of pain as my nephew. As the assessment process was already underway, I regularly attended the sessions at the (Environmental Impact) Assessment Examination Committee of Kanagawa prefecture and the Council for Environmental Assessment of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. I asked questions at the explanatory meetings organized by companies, and as a resident of the affected area put forward a statement of opinion demanding the halt of the project at public hearings.

What surprised me the most in those contexts was how the assessment was simplified based on the claim that, despite a new coal-fired power plant being built in the same place where the old existing facilities had all gone out of commission, the impact on the environment would be lowered. This observation stemmed from a comparison to 18 years prior, when all of the former facilities were still in operation. It deviated from the streamlining guidelines acknowledged in the simplified assessment, and, despite being pointed out by both the prefectural assessment examination committee and the prefectural governors, was not revised.

We cannot accept such an EIA document that has been simplified to have something interpreted for one's own benefit and is substantially lacking consideration for the environment.

The (environmental impact) assessment system should be an important tool for the realization of a sustainable society. But the process employed by the companies is doing nothing but harm to this system.

What I want to mention next I have already said at the public hearing. Approving the construction of new coal-fired power units will lead to the emission of large amounts of CO₂ over the long term, and to the further worsening of climate change. It means not only that we cannot achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, but also leaves a negative legacy for the future generations.

Companies stress that they are in line with the nation's policy direction of consistency with the Basic Energy Plan, the achievement of benchmarks etc. — but those do not ensure CO₂ emission reduction targets. As pointed out by the Minister of Environment, cuts to already existing coal power are necessary in order to achieve the CO₂ emission reductions called for in the Paris Agreement. He should neither permit constructions of new units, nor expansions of existing plants.

Damages caused by intensifying climate change have grown into real threats in Japan, in the form of disasters due to record storms and heavy rainfall, frequent heatstrokes etc., as experienced in Chiba, Kanagawa, and various places last month.

The young generation has now started raising their voices for climate change as their own problem. Seeing this, I see hope, but simultaneously also feel responsibility. Because I am one of the generations that allowed climate change to become as bad as it is now. If we don't do anything, we will be accused in the eyes of the future generations.

Dramatic changes are occurring all around the world speeding up toward decarbonization. But Japan, as the only one country among the developed nations, is moving in the opposite direction — the Yokosuka coal-fired power plant construction is a symbolic project of Japanese coal policy.

I am giving my statement to sincerely ask for a historical decision to be made in this trial that could become a turning point for climate change mitigation in Japan. Thank you.