Minister of Environment Japan Mr. Akihiro Nishimura
CC: Ministers of Climate, Energy and Environment of G6 countries and EU

31st March 2023

Petition letter regarding the Ministers' Meeting on Climate, Energy and Environment in Sapporo

The Group of 7 (G7) Ministers' Meeting on Climate, Energy and Environment (abbreviated below as Environment Ministers' Meeting) will be held in Sapporo on April 15th and 16th, 2023.

At the G7 summit in Germany last year, G7 leaders committed to tackling climate change and energy issues to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, including decarbonizing the energy sector by 2035. As the G7 Presidency this year, Japan is called upon to strengthen its domestic policies and strive to demonstrate results that exceed the commitments made at the G7 last year.

However, the Japanese government is reportedly coordinating the G7 Ministerial Statement to include wording to "welcome" the process of releasing treated contaminated water from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.[1] It has also been reported that the other G7 members are opposing the current draft text by the Japanese government as it does not include a phase out date for coal power. [2]

Meanwhile, the Japanese government has launched its Green Transformation (GX) strategy and is trying to promote GX globally via the G7. However, the GX strategy is full of "false climate solutions," including hydrogen and ammonia, which would only prolong the use of fossil fuels and nuclear power.

The IPCC 6th Synthesis Report Summary for Policymakers, released on March 20, states that achieving the 1.5°C target will require rapid and deep and, in most cases, immediate greenhouse gas emissions reductions in all sectors this decade.[3]

The release of contaminated water and continued support for coal power would contradict the purpose of the G7 Environment Ministers' Meeting, which should hold discussions to protect the environment and stop climate change. The Japanese government should show leadership to protect the environment and stop climate change.

In the lead up to the Environment Ministers' Meeting, we request the following:

Phase out of fossil fuels

In 2022, the G7 countries committed to *fully or predominantly* decarbonize the power sector by 2035 and to end new direct public support for the international unabated fossil fuel energy sector by the end of 2022.[4] However, Japan's target power mix in FY2030 is set at 41% fossil fuels (19% coal-fired power), 20-22% nuclear power, and 36-38% renewable energy.[5] If Japan wishes to decarbonize the power sector by 2035, it must urgently review its domestic policies.

Also, in order to keep the temperature below 1.5°C with a 50% probability, it is necessary to reduce greenhouse gases by about 43% by 2030 and by 60% by 2035 compared to 2019.[6] The Japanese government's reduction target for 2030 is 46% compared to 2013, or 37% relative to 2019, which is insufficient in comparison with global reduction targets. Japan, with a huge historical responsibility to climate crisis, should step up its 2030 target to at least a 60% reduction.

Currently, the Japanese government is promoting the GX policy and the details are expected to be decided by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. The standards for decarbonization and environmental and social considerations are unclear, and "false solutions" are being promoted, such as the construction of new nuclear power plants, the extension of the operational life of nuclear power plants, co-firing of hydrogen, ammonia, and biomass, and the extension of thermal (fossil fuel) power generation through carbon capture and storage (CCS). Relying on technologies such as hydrogen, ammonia, and CCS, for which the prospects for practical application and commercialization are uncertain, and their effectiveness in reducing emissions and economic feasibility are questionable, there is a high possibility that decarbonization targets for 2035 will not be met. Also, taking into account the risks and costs associated with nuclear power, such as malfunctions, accidents, and nuclear waste that needs to be stored for an extremely long time, nuclear power should not be pursued as a solution to climate change. It is necessary to shift to a power system centered on renewable energy, and a drastic reduction in energy demand is also required.

Regarding liquefied natural gas (LNG), wording was added to last year's G7 communiqué to allow gas investment as a temporary measure to reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels. In order to break away from this, instead of continuing to invest in new gas infrastructure, we should break away from dependence on fossil fuels.

Among the G7 countries, Japan contributes the largest amount of public money to fossil fuel projects. Last year, the G7 made a conditional commitment to end new international public support to the fossil fuel energy sector by the end of 2022. The Japanese government has not fulfilled this commitment and has been providing public support to fossil fuel projects overseas. From 2019 to 2021, Japan spent an average of more than $10 billion in public funds annually on fossil fuels projects while spending an average of one-eighth of that, at $1.3 billion annually on renewable energy projects.[7] Furthermore, as part of its support for decarbonization in Asian countries, the Japanese government is promoting technologies such as hydrogen or ammonia co-combustion and CCS in thermal power plants and on March 4 hosted the Asia Zero Emissions Community (AZEC) ministerial meeting. Civil society in Asia has voiced opposition to the promotion of these "false solutions."[8]

As the G7 Presidency this year, the Japanese government should commit to phase out coal by 2030 and steadily implement other existing commitments. In addition, the G7 should not promote erroneous climate change measures such as nuclear power, hydrogen and ammonia. The government also should stop promoting false solutions overseas and strengthen support for clean energy that meets the needs of communities, respects human rights, and is aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Phase out nuclear power, do not release/spread contaminated water and soil

The GX strategy which the Kishida administration is promoting includes restarting nuclear power plants, extending the operational life of existing plants, and developing and constructing so-called “next-generation innovative reactors.”

The government argues that nuclear power contributes to "energy security," "stable power supply," and "self-determination." However, uranium, fuel for nuclear power plants, is dependent on imports like fossil fuels, and is affected by international circumstances. There is also the possibility that nuclear power plants will become targets for terrorism and war. Nuclear power plants have frequent malfunctions, and if nuclear power plants, which are large-scale, centralized power sources, are shut down unexpectedly, they present a greater risk of systemic supply failures.

Globally, the cost of nuclear power generation continues to rise. The cost to construct a nuclear power plant has already exceeded 1 trillion yen, and nuclear power plants are now the most expensive source of electricity. In Japan as well, additional safety measures required to restart reactors, maintenance, and decommissioning costs are rising. TEPCO has spent more than 1 trillion yen on safety measures for restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant, Niigata Prefecture.

Nuclear power is neither green nor clean. From uranium mining to fuel processing, operation, nuclear waste disposal and decommissioning, the environment continues to be polluted with radioactive materials. As long as nuclear power plants operate, they generate nuclear waste that needs to be managed for tens of thousands of years, imposing a huge burden on future generations. Twelve years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and the subsequent accident at the Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, but the disaster is not over yet.

According to media reports, the Japanese government is trying to have other G7 countries support wording in the draft G7 environment ministers’ joint statement indicating they "welcome a transparent process toward the release of 'treated water'" and "welcome progress" of the plan to reuse decontaminated soil. The G7 Environment Ministers' Meeting is supposed to discuss environmental conservation and pollution, so "welcoming" the spread of contaminated water and polluted soil would go against the purpose of the meeting.

Regarding “ALPS-treated” contaminated water, the government and TEPCO have plans to start releasing it into the ocean before the summer of 2023. However, no understanding has been reached with fishermen and other stakeholders. TEPCO has not yet indicated, by nuclide, the total amount of radioactive materials remaining in the water. Preparations to discharge the contaminated water are underway, even though it is still unclear exactly what will be released, and in what quantity.

The government is trying to promote the “reuse” of contaminated soil, generated from decontamination work, in public works projects if the soil contains cesium-134 and 137 at levels below 8,000 becquerels/kg. However, this is 80 times the clearance level (which is 100 becquerel/kg for cesium-134 and 137) stipulated by the Nuclear Reactor Regulation Act for not requiring management as radioactive materials.

It must also be noted that the government has a policy of not measuring radioactive materials other than cesium. Among the demonstration projects that were to be carried out in Fukushima Prefecture, the Ministry of the Environment was forced to withdraw plans due to community opposition in the Harasesaiki district of Nihonmatsu City and the Hanokura area, Odaka district of Minamisoma. Residents are also opposed to demonstration projects being planned in the Tokyo metropolitan area. It is a basic principle that radioactive materials should be managed centrally, not dispersed. We oppose the release of contaminated water into the ocean and the reuse of contaminated soil for public works.

Conserve biodiversity including Antarctic

Last year's G7 environment ministers communiqué said "We express our deep concern regarding the triple global crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, recognising that these challenges are inextricably interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and that they are driven largely by human activity and by unsustainable patterns of consumption and production," and committed to stop and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, and to conserve or protect at least 30% of the land and sea of G7 countries by 2030.

At this year's Environment Ministers' Meeting, the G7 should at least reaffirm these commitments and strengthen domestic efforts to ensure their fulfillment.

The greatest threats to biodiversity are deforestation, mining, large-scale development activities involving land reclamation, and excessive resource extraction and consumption. In Japan, projects such as the linear Chuo Shinkansen and the construction of the Henoko U.S. military base accompany large-scale ecosystem destruction. The necessity of those projects are unclear. Such projects should be stopped.

Japanese society depends on imported materials, such as timber, palm oil, mineral resources and beef. Due diligence of financial institutions and companies are needed to avoid environmental destruction and human rights violations in supply chains.

Furthermore, in the name of climate change countermeasures, mega-solar development and large-scale biomass power generation projects are underway that threaten forest ecosystems. Domestically in Japan, it is necessary to strengthen the effectiveness of land use zoning and environmental impact assessment systems, as well as measures to exclude projects that have high environmental impacts, such as those that involve deforestation, from being eligible for preferential treatment such as FIT.

There is also a call for the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Antarctic, but the establishment of new MPAs has been delayed. In last year's G7 Environment Ministers Communiqué and in the G7 Ocean Deal, the G7 supported the efforts by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to establish a representative system of MPAs within the Convention area as soon as possible The Japanese government should make every effort for the establishment of MPAs in the Antarctic.

Friends of the Earth Japan

[1] Asahi Shimbun "Japan wants G-7 backing for plans on Fukushima water, soil", 22nd February 2023, https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14845638
[2] Mainichi Shimbun " Japan is getting criticized from the G6 on its draft statement as it lacks the end date for coal" (in Japanese) 14th March 2023 https://mainichi.jp/articles/20230314/k00/00m/030/202000c
[3] IPCC, Synthesis report of the IPCC 6th Assessment Report (AR6) Summary for Policymakers, 20th March 2023 https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syr/pdf/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf
[4] Climate, Energy and Environment Ministers' Communiqué, 27th May 2022 https://www.g7germany.de/g7-en/g7-documents
[5] 6th Basic Energy Plan of Japan,
[6] IPCC
[7] Oil Change International "Japan's Dirty Secret: World's top fossil fuel financier is fueling climate chaos and undermining energy security", 8th November 2022, https://priceofoil.org/2022/11/08/japans-dirty-secret/
[8] Press Release : Japan's "Zero Emissions" strategy is a Greenwashing - 140 Civil society groups from 18 countries sent an open letter to G7 chair demanding support on swift, just and equitable transition from fossil fuels and not on "false solutions" March 2nd 2023 https://foejapan.org/en/issue/20230301/11730/