



OP-ED

By: Joey Tau

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Pacific leaders must hold Japan accountable at PALM10 for Fukushima nuclear waste

Last month's visit to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat by Japanese Foreign Minister, Yōko Kamikawa, to convene an interim Ministerial meeting of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) was applauded by Pacific foreign officials and ministers as a reassuring gesture of Japan's commitment to the blue Pacific.

But for many Pacific civil society organizations, activists and movements, Minister Kamikawa's visit was the latest in a series of overtures to sweet talk the region to overlook the ongoing nuclear wastewater dumping into the Pacific Ocean at Fukushima.

Despite numerous calls by Pacific civil society groups, Government ministers from [Vanuatu](#), [Papua New Guinea](#), and leaders from the [Melanesian Spearhead Group](#) for the Japanese Government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, Inc. (TEPCO) to stop their plans to discharge over 1.28 million tonnes of radioactive waste into the ocean, our voices have been ignored.

As part of this charm offensive, a full-page statement on the 12th of February in the FijiSun titled, [Pacific Island Countries and Japan - Valued Friends Connected by the Blue Pacific](#), had Minister Kamikawa describing the Pacific's relationship with Japan as a bond of trust, shared values and principles. She termed the Pacific-Japan relationship as *Kizuna*, a Japanese term that speaks of enduring bonds between people, and of close relationships forged through mutual trust and support.

For Pacific people, Japan's refusal to heed repeated calls by our fisherfolk, youth and women's groups, community elders, churches and government leaders, all intimately connected to our Blue Pacific waters, to stop its Fukushima nuclear wastewater dumping plans is exactly the reason why we cannot trust the Government of Japan.

Kamikawa's recent mission portrays the patronising presumption that we in the Pacific remain ignorant of the realities of the Fukushima fiasco and of the actual reasons for her esteemed visit. Our own panel of experts commissioned by the

Pacific Islands Forum in 2022 to look into the matter have stated in no uncertain terms that scientific data released by TEPCO was inconsistent, all options were not exhausted before Japan started dumping, and there continues to be lack of transparency with sharing scientific information.

Even a member of the expert panel has criticized both [Japan and the International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#) for ignoring one of its own fundamental principles. Panelist, Dr Arjun Makhijani argues that the IAEA has failed to fulfill its responsibilities on account of the decision by Japan to already go ahead with its decision to dump. This has resulted in one of the fundamental safety principles, reviewing the justification for the actions, to not be examined. This calls into question the veracity of the IAEA report.

Various other learned and concerned voices around the region, including Japanese civil society groups, environmental activists, and international environmental groups such as Greenpeace have emphasised the special risks of the disposal option chosen by the Japanese Government in an age of heightened stresses to the Oceans' system functions and climate emergency. Moreover, we are well aware that the 'dumping' option is not, as claimed by the Japanese authorities, the only course of action available.

Kamikawa's friends in Tokyo have however decided to justify its actions by hiding behind the International Atomic Energy Agency's sanitised findings, Japan's right under international law to do as it pleases within its territorial waters, and to lecture the Pacific from a false moral position in regard to both. This behaviour is diametrically opposed to any conceivable values that would underpin cordial, mutually respectful and trusting relationships, and most certainly not consistent with *Kizuna*.

With Tokyo's blessings, TEPCO has now dumped over 31,200 tons of radioactive waste into the Pacific since August 2023, and is expected to dump another 54,600 tons of nuclear-contaminated water this year.

It is now even more concerning with ongoing reports of accidents and mishaps at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, which have fully exposed the chaos and disorder of TEPCO's management. In August 2023, days before the first round of discharge started, TEPCO found leaks in a hose used to transfer nuclear wastewater. Later in October 2023, just one week before the third round of release, two men were hospitalized after being accidentally splashed with radioactive liquid at the plant. In February this year, [a new nuclear waste leakage of about 5.5 tons of water containing radioactive waste was reported](#). It is estimated that 22 billion becquerels of radioactive materials such as cesium and strontium are contained in the leaked water, yet TEPCO claims that their monitoring did not show any significant radiation level changes.

There is a need for an independent supervision of Japan's dumping plans, and the message from Pacific groups and civil society organisations remains emphatic that Japan must be held accountable. And if Governments cease to speak up, Pacific groups and civil society organizations can easily seem to be the only voices in our region maintaining pressure on Japan.

In November 2023, [Pacific NGOs gave Pacific leaders an ultimatum](#) to suspend Japan as a forum dialogue partner. In a [special complaint](#) to respective UN Human Rights Special Rapporteurs and the UN Human Rights Council, over 56 Pacific NGOs argued that Japan's actions violate the human rights of Pacific peoples as well as breaching international protocols and instruments protecting marine biodiversity, and will contravene the Rarotonga Treaty.

The groups are now calling on Japan to terminate its Fukushima discharge of the nuclear-contaminated wastewater, until all other alternatives are exhausted and until such a time as adequate safeguards, including sufficient scientific knowledge, are provided to ensure such activities can be carried out in a way that respects, protects and fulfils human rights standards.

As Pacific Leaders prepare for their PALM10 Summit with Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, much is expected of our Leaders to hold Japan accountable for its actions, which is nothing short of dumping nuclear contaminated wastewater into our ocean. Lest we forget, our Pacific legacy demands that they will reaffirm, in solidarity, their commitment to keep our region nuclear-free, which encompasses opposing all forms of nuclear harm to our people, our earth and our ocean.

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