

*The 2nd International Forum on Environmental Pollution and Social Impacts:
“Applying the Lessons Learned from Minamata Disease and its
Mistakes to the Future”*

2013 Minamata DECLARATION

September 8, 2013

An international forum on Environmental Pollution and Social Impacts was held in Kumamoto and Minamata from the 5th to the 8th of September 2013. It was organized by the Open Research Center for Minamata Studies of Kumamoto Gakuen University. More than 200 participants from Japan, (especially Fukushima, Niigata and Minamata) and 5 other countries and regions, Canada, China, Korea, Thailand and Taiwan gathered for practical and informal discussion; including survivors, NGOs and researchers from various other campaigns. The theme of this year’s forum was “Applying the Lessons Learned from Minamata Disease and its Mistakes to the Future”.

Never before had there been such a grave illness, that included devastating intergenerational effects, caused by widespread industrial pollution. This case had an enormous impact on the politics, business, law, society and culture of Minamata. Nevertheless, the suffering of the victims and the problems of Minamata disease persist.

National and prefectural governments are failing in their duties and would not admit the faults in the certification system of Minamata disease.

On March 11, 2011 Japan experienced a catastrophic tsunami disaster caused by a magnitude 9 earthquake off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture. This triggered one of the worst nuclear accidents since Chernobyl, the destruction of the Fukushima nuclear power plant. The radiation released has created a serious crisis for Japan and increasingly for the world. To date more than 100,000 people have been evacuated from Fukushima. Recently it has been confirmed that a greater amount of radioactive waste water than was previously admitted to has been flushed into the surrounding ocean.

Under current circumstances it is impossible to predict when there will be a resolution to this disaster.

We are now forced into the long term challenge of the fight against large scale radioactive contamination.

Environmental pollution has occurred all over the world, and the struggles of humanity against it continue. Thus, in global terms, as well as domestically, we have to admit the fact that the lessons of Minamata disease have yet to be learned.

One of the lessons we have failed to learn is how best to aid the survivors of this tragedy. Another, how never to repeat it.

In this forum we came face to face with the horrifying realities of pollution and heard the testimony of many who wage a daily battle against this injustice. It is important to always think and act from the view points of those affected in order to help and solve these problems. The need to exchange information and experience is self-evident.

In recognition of these facts a diplomatic conference centered on the Minamata convention on mercury will be held in Minamata and Kumamoto next month. The contents of this convention have not made the best use of the lessons of the history of Minamata disease. Therefore we need to imbue the Minamata convention with validity in order to strengthen it in the international legal sphere.

And so, after 4 hard and inspiring days, we declare that our realization that the Minamata disease issue is not over, that we shall learn from the failures of the past, and that we shall assist the survivors of Minamata disease and others worldwide through our on going discussions, reports and exchanges.

We adopt this declaration so that the negative lessons from a half century of Minamata Disease will finally help us envision and create a brighter future.