

Japan: Fukuryu Maru No. 5 was not the only victim of the 1954 Bikini hydrogen bomb test

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Director sheds light on Bikini Atoll

TV director Hideaki Ito could not stay silent when he learned that the Fukuryu Maru No. 5 was not the only victim of the 1954 hydrogen bomb test conducted by the United States in the Pacific, and that more Japanese fishing boats were exposed to the fallout all those decades ago.

"This isn't just about the Fukuryu Maru, and we should not trivialize the problem," the 52-year-old director said at Nankai Broadcasting Co., based in Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture.

The 23 crew members of the Fukuryu Maru, a tuna boat from Shizuoka Prefecture, were all exposed to radioactive fallout from the H-bomb test on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands on March 1, 1954.

With the hope of shedding fresh light on the problem, Ito last year made a documentary film titled "'X' Years Later," compiling his findings from eight years of investigations and interviews. Ito visits theaters where the film is screened on a nonprofit basis and asks the audience to help search for former crew members of radiation-exposed fishing boats.

"Since it is obvious that the tests have caused damage to human bodies, we need to clarify what actually happened," he said. "If many victims are found, the Japanese government will have to act."

Among the Fukuryu Maru crew members, chief radio operator Aikichi Kuboyama died at the age of 40 only six months after returning from Bikini Atoll. Through years of investigations, Ito has also found out that former crew members on other fishing boats died at a relatively young age.

A native of Ehime Prefecture, Ito first worked at a kindergarten after graduating from junior college. As he was interested in producing videos, he entered the TV industry and started making programs in Tokyo. After returning to Ehime in 2002, he joined Nankai Broadcasting and has directed documentary shows.

Ito first learned about the Bikini Atoll incident from Masatoshi Yamashita, a high school teacher in Kochi Prefecture. Yamashita and his students had interviewed former crew members who served aboard fishing boats believed to have been affected by U.S. nuclear tests near the atoll, including the March 1 detonation.

Ito also obtained declassified U.S. government documents showing that many Japanese tuna boats were operating in areas contaminated by radioactive fallout and, further, that radiation affected the whole of Japan.

In June, "'X' Years Later" received the Galaxy Grand Prix in the reporting category from the Association of Broadcast Critics.

Ito said he is worried that the Fukushima No. 1 disaster may go the same way if no one does anything.

"The cases concerning other fishing boats than the Fukuryu Maru have disappeared from Japanese people's memories," Ito said, criticizing the government for failing to conduct a thorough investigation on the effects of radiation on other boats and instead declaring them safe.

"We should not let the same thing happen" with the Fukushima crisis, he said.

Shin Hara, Kyodo News, September 4, 2013

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<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/04/national/director-sheds-light-on-bikini-atoll/#.Ui2SrX9jbRY>