Residents unable to return home for 5 years: Tomioka town

Katsuya Endo, mayor of Tomioka town in Fukushima Prefecture, declared on Sept. 26 that the town government and residents would be unable to return home for at least five years from now because it will take time to decontaminate the town from radioactive substances and restore its infrastructure.

The mayor issued the declaration after the Tomioka town assembly unanimously passed at its extraordinary session that day a resolution vowing not to lift an evacuation order for at least five years from now. The town assembly held the session in the city of Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture.

Tomioka 2nd Fukushima Pref. municipality not to return home for long period

The town of Tomioka became the second municipality in Fukushima Prefecture that has decided not to return home for a long period of time. Earlier, the town of Okuma, which is one of the two towns hosting the disaster-hit Fukushima Daiichi power plant, declared its residents would not return home for a long period of time.

The resolution passed by the town assembly said the town has come to a decision that all its residents cannot return home for six years since the outbreak in March 2011 of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

As reasons for the declaration, the resolution cited a lack of effective radioactivity decontamination technologies, insufficient results of decontamination work and time-consuming work to restore infrastructure.

The resolution said it is not clear when farmers can resume agricultural work and that it is difficult to create industries and offer jobs to residents.

The resolution also pointed out a lack of medical, educational and welfare institutions as well as retailers. It also said the central government-set criteria of the annual radioactivity dosages of 20 millisieverts for residents to return home is not enough to dispel residents' worries about their health from radiation. The resolution also expressed doubt about the safety of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station in the future.

Endo said the resolution reflects the town government's resolve to declare that residents are unable to return home for a long period of time. "We would like to see the central government take the resolution very seriously," Endo said.

The town of Tomioka is expected to be reclassified shortly into three zones -- an area difficult to return to for a long time, a residence-restricted area with visitation-only access and an area readying for the lifting of evacuation orders.

The timing of the lifting of evacuation orders would be one of the criteria for calculations on the payment of compensation for properties and houses. The central government will decide when to lift the evacuation orders following a decision by each municipality.

But the central government has shown reluctance to pay an equal amount of damages to residents in the three areas to be reclassified, noting the need to maintain equality with other municipalities.

(Translated by Kyodo News)
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13-17 Ota-machi Fukushima City Fukushima 〒960-8602