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Dalai Lama: A Role for Nuclear Power in Development Process

The Dalai Lama has been an active voice opposing nuclear weapons. But after a whirlwind trip touring the tsunami-devastated northeastern patch of Japan for the first time, the religious figure said he is not absolutely against the promotion of nuclear energy. Instead, the Dalai Lama on Monday said he is in support of using nuclear



Makiko Segawa/The Wall Street Journal

The Dalai Lama speaks to the media in Tokyo on Nov. 7.

under the poverty level and we have to think about these people,” the 76-year-old spiritual leader said at a news conference on Monday morning in Tokyo. He noted that other energy sources like wind and solar are too inefficient to put into realistic practice to meet the needs of fast-developing countries.

The Dalai Lama was steady in this view during his weekend trip to the north eastern region, which included a brief stop in Fukushima prefecture where he spoke at a university in Koriyama city. Located nearly 40 miles from the troubled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, Koriyama city lies far outside the mandatory evacuation zone around the plant, but traces of radioactive contamination in school playgrounds and produce has made monitoring efforts a daily part of the residents’ new way of life.

The Dalai Lama led a mass prayer in memory of the March 11 victims when he came to Japan in April, but did not travel to the affected areas.

On Monday, he urged people on both sides of the contentious nuclear argument to look at the issue “holistically.” “Just to look at it from one side then to make a decision is not right,” he said. While speaking to the benefits of nuclear energy,

energy for peaceful means as a way to bridge the socioeconomic gap in developing countries in the absence of more efficient alternative energy sources. “There is still many developing countries with a huge gap between rich and poor...millions of people’s lives remain

however, he underlined the holistic lens needed to be pointed at the issue of risk as well. Nuclear energy specialists “should take maximum sorts of preparations.”

Even then, he warned that no amount of preparation can completely rule out danger. Riding a car, eating a meal, and even sitting in the very venue of the news conference always comes with a degree of risk: “There is still 1% (chance) of danger,” he said, shaking his body from side to side as if being rocked by an earthquake.

But the Dalai Lama said that the ultimate fate of using nuclear power should be a democratic choice. “In the end if the people want to eliminate (it) then it’s up to the people,” he said.

Separately, the Dalai Lama had a word of advice to younger Japanese: mind your traditional values.

“I really admire you Japanese people. You really built a healthy democratic society. It is industrialized and you also keep to your centuries-old traditional values. That’s good,” he said during his opening remarks.

“I’ve heard that one of your traditional values is to respect the elderly people,” such as when “old ladies or old gentlemen are on the bus or train. Previously if one person comes the younger one used to stand and share the seat. But that kind of situation I’ve heard that has little bit degenerated. So I think you should pay more attention to traditional values.”