

Evanoff, Richard (2012). "New Green Party Launched in Japan." Green Horizon 26:30.  
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## **New Green Party Launched in Japan**

On July 28, 2012 a group of local assembly members, citizens groups, and activists met in Tokyo to launch the Midori-no-to (Green Party), also referred to as the Greens Japan. The party was formed a little more than a year after a 9.0 earthquake and tsunami hit Japan on March 11, 2011, resulting in the meltdown of three nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant in the north.

The new 1,000-member party is in the process of meeting the legal requirements to become an officially registered party in time for Japan's next general election, which must be held by Autumn 2013 at the latest but could come much sooner. The party plans to contest 10 seats in the Upper House election and other seats in the Lower House as finances permit.

The party's initiatives include proposals to eliminate Japan's reliance on nuclear energy and to promote the use of renewable energy as a way to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Both Japan's ruling party, the Democratic Party, headed by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, and the leading opposition party, the Liberal Democrats, support the restart of nuclear power stations that were shut down following the disaster. The Japan Green Party aims to give voters a clear anti-nuclear alternative at the election box. At the party's founding, deputy head Akira Miyabe stated, "A party that strongly pursues environmental policies is needed."

Recent anti-nuclear demonstrations in Tokyo and other areas have been the largest in Japan since the anti-war protests of the 1960s and 70s. The day after the founding of the Japan Green Party, an estimated 170,000 citizens held a candlelight vigil around Japan's parliament building, calling for an end to nuclear power. Anti-nuclear activists had previously collected 320,000 signatures asking for a referendum on nuclear power, but their request was voted down by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government on June 20.

The Green Party of Japan hopes to gain the support of civic groups concerned not only with nuclear issues but also about creating a sustainable society. The party's proposals include calls for an economy based on local production for local consumption, enhanced social security programs funded by a more equitable tax system, and greater democratic participation in the political process.

The Greens Japan are also opposed to Japan's participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free-trade negotiations, which are being promoted by the current government as a way to increase economic growth but would devastate domestic agriculture and lead to a further decline in Japan's already precarious food self-sufficiency rate. (Japan presently imports more than 60% of its food from overseas.)

The media is billing the Green Party of Japan as Japan's "first Green Party," but in fact two Green parties had previously emerged in the 1990s: the Japan Green Party and the Japan Green Federation. A successor political network, called the Rainbow and Greens, merged with these groups in 2008 to form an organization called the Midori-no-Mirai (Green Future). This latter group has had considerable success in local elections, including the 2010 election of Kazumi Inamura as Japan's first Green Mayor in the city of Amagasaki (in the Osaka area). The new Green Party of Japan is the most recent manifestation of these earlier political formations.

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August 9, 2012