

ZENSUIDO Statement on the Enactment of a Partial Revision of the Water Supply Act
6 December 2018

In a plenary session of the House of Representatives today, a bill for the partial revision of the Water Supply Act was passed and enacted by a majority in favour of the bill consisting of the ruling parties and some opposition parties.

The bill for the revised Water Supply Act, while premised on a strengthening of waterworks infrastructure, facilitates the introduction of a system of rights to manage public facilities, the so-called concession system. Since revision of the Water Supply Act is a crucial issue directly linked to the daily lives of all people living in Japan, ZENSUIDO opposed the introduction of the concession system and demanded prudent and full deliberations on the bill.

Thus far, the Water Supply Act has undergone several important revisions, but this is the first time that a bill has entailed this kind of opposition between ruling and opposition parties. Due to the incorporation of the concession system into the bill, deliberations regarding the genuinely necessary infrastructure strengthening measures were totally inadequate.

It can only be said that the deliberations in the committees in which ZENSUIDO participated, the Committee on Living Environment and Water Supply of the Health Sciences Council, the Specialist Committee on the Maintenance and Improvement of Waterworks, and the Investigative Committee on Measures to Strengthen Waterworks Infrastructure, have not been taken into account. The responsibility for this lies totally with the government, and we strongly criticize the government for having no intention to push forward the infrastructure strengthening measures that the country genuinely requires.

Despite the repeated demands for full deliberations by opposition parties in the House of Representatives Committee on Health, Labour and Welfare in the recent 196th regular Diet session, the ruling parties cut off questions and enforced a vote on the bill after a mere eight hours of deliberations. On November 29, Takeo Nikaïdo, Chairperson of the Central Executive Committee of ZENSUIDO expressed his views as a witness at the House of Councillors Committee on Health, Labour and Welfare of the 197th extraordinary session of the Diet, in particular elucidating the problems of measures to bolster waterworks with austere financial or challenging technological foundations as they relate to the introduction of the concession system. During Diet questions on the bill for the revision of the Act, suspicions concerning facilitation for the making of profits by huge multinational water companies, the so-called water majors, were buttressed when it was revealed that a person seconded from the Japanese affiliate of the mammoth water corporation Veolia was working at the Cabinet Office's Private Finance Initiative Promotion Office and that a former Cabinet Office ministerial aide was alleged to have been dispatched on a visit to Europe.

Internationally, the privatization of waterworks had moved forward up to the 1990s, with a number of problems such as the structure of collusion between governments and huge water corporations, opaque capital flows, and inadequate investment in water supply facilities coming to the fore, leading to the current advance of water supplies being returned to the public sphere. Despite this, there is little option but to say that there are serious concealed suspicions in the way that the bill for the revision has been devised and presented, including revelations of a structure of collusion with water companies also existing in Japan.

We must not tolerate the policies of a very limited number of municipalities that are devoted only to economic thinking to sell out the citizens' water to huge water majors, some of which are foreign funded, and the policy of the government that has confused this with the necessary support measures for municipalities that wish to continue a publicly-operated water supply. During the deliberations on the bill, the councils of 13 municipalities passed a statement of opinion calling for abolition of the bill. The government must not turn their back on the efforts of almost all Japan's municipalities, including these 13 municipalities, that are attempting to continue their publicly-operated water supply systems.

Zensuido will steadfastly maintain the basic principle of providing a water supply that is safe, stable and of reasonable cost and further strengthen efforts to promote advances in water policy to protect and develop the water supply as social infrastructure that supports both the daily lives of citizens and company activities.