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Thousands of pets left in Japan nuke zone

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By Christopher Johnson - Special to The Washington Times

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TOKYO — When about 80,000 people were told to flee explosions at the stricken Fukushima nuclear power plant in March, many left their pets at home, thinking they could soon return to get them.

Two months later, thousands of pets are still there, starving, scavenging or waiting for their owners to come home to an area sealed off by the government.

Wearing protective clothing and face masks, Makomi Tsuruta, a pet rescuer, went into the 12-mile danger zone near the plant a few weeks ago with a Geiger counter, food and cages to rescue seven cats. She was acting at the request of their owner, a farmer named Mr. O-uchi, who lives in an evacuation shelter.

"I wasn't scared, but the animals were," she said.

The cats were mangy and starving, and some other cats in the area were even feeding on carcasses of dead animals, including other cats, she said.

After checking them for radiation and washing them, she had them vaccinated by a veterinarian. She took the seven cats to join another 23 felines already living at her home in Ibaraki prefecture just south of Fukushima.

Disoriented at first, the seven rescued cats now are eating and adjusting to their 23 new friends, she said.

Mrs. Tsuruta, a member of one of about 70 animal welfare groups in Japan, said she would like to go back to rescue some of the estimated 5,000 cats and dogs left behind in the radiation zone, in addition to thousands of horses, cows, pigs, chickens and other animals.

