

A Message from Fukushima on March 11, 2020

It has been nine years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and the subsequent nuclear disaster occurred at the Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

As excitement continues to build around the world for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the national soccer training center, J-Village in Fukushima Prefecture, which was once used as an operational base for dealing with the nuclear disaster, has regained its lush turf and once again has become a shining place of hope for children who love playing soccer.

In some areas of the difficult-to-return zone, evacuation orders have been lifted. While services on the JR Joban Line, once stopped, have been restored, bringing back the lively sound of trains to the region.

In this way, Fukushima has been steadily moving towards revitalization.

However, more than 40,000 residents have yet to return to their hometowns.

Those who have returned to their lives in their hometowns are facing the changes that have taken place in their absence.

Behind fading interest in the disaster and deeply rooted harmful-rumors, there are still children who are experiencing hard times, and residents living with loneliness.

Last year, while many disasters occurred throughout Japan, Fukushima was also severely damaged by Typhoon Hagibis and heavy rains.

Even now, we are faced with many different challenges, on the long path to revitalization.

"The experience of the 3.11 disaster made me think that we should help each other in times of need. I dream of a society where everyone is able to cheerfully support one another."

- Konno Minobu, Motomiya High School.

"When the disaster struck, many people helped me. This time, I hope I can return the favor."

- Watanabe Mitsuru, at his Coming of Age Ceremony in Futaba Town.

"Fukushima is still transitioning through its revitalization. There are many different kinds of people here: those who are moving forward, those who are staying as they are, and those who are taking the time to think about things very deeply. That is the truth of the people in Fukushima."

- Okubo Keiko, a university student from Kansai and participant in the Fukushima Prefectural Symposium.

Many young people in Fukushima wish to help others, and many actively do so.

We have been supported by a lot of kindness, and have received a lot of help at every step along our journey towards revitalization. This has strengthened our desire to do the same for others.

Through these experiences we have realized the power of kindness. I am sure that we will continue to respect each other, form close bonds, and support each other as we decisively take on the many difficult challenges to come.

"If we actively show the world that we are doing our best, despite our hardships, I think my hometown will become a brighter and more vibrant place than even before the disaster occurred."

- Ikari Manami, Yumoto High School

Following the beginning of the Reiwa era, Fukushima will meet its tenth year since the Great East Japan Earthquake, as the revitalization enters a new stage.

Now, in Fukushima, more and more people are working to create new jobs that connect the next generation with their local communities.

Our hard work sends a positive message for the future that will lead our continued efforts towards reconstruction and revitalization.

We were suddenly deprived of our daily lives by the disaster. It was then that we truly realized how irreplaceable our way of life was, a way of living which our ancestors had passed down to us.

That is why it is so important that we teach future generations about what we learned from the disaster, and about how disasters can happen to anyone.

Many residents of our prefecture say that the disaster is still too difficult to talk about.

It is important to give them the support and comfort that they need until the day they are able to express themselves.

“In the future, I want people all over the world to enjoy the milk from the cows I will raise.

I want to show the world what farming is like in my village, and charge ahead towards fulfilling my dream as a dairy farmer.”

- Sakuma Ryoji, Olympic Torch Bearer, Katsurao Junior High School.

Soon, the Olympic torch relay will start in Fukushima.

Then, in summer, Olympic baseball and softball games will be held here, attracting many people from all over the world. And for the first time in Olympic history, hydrogen will be used as the fuel for the Olympic Cauldron.

This hydrogen, made in Fukushima is the next generation of environmentally friendly energy and represent the progress and adaptability of humanity, as well as a step forward for the preservation of the earth.

For the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Medalists' Bouquets, Lisianthus flowers from Fukushima have been chosen to be included in the arrangement.

In the language of flowers, they express "Gratitude" and "Hope."

We want to thank everyone who has supported Fukushima and everyone who keeps us in their thoughts, and we wish for people all over the world to see Fukushima, shining with the light of hope as we move forward towards revitalization, one step at a time.

With the strength and flexibility that we have gained while confronting many hardships, we have become able to overcome any obstacle, and in time the day will come when we have achieved the revitalization of Fukushima.

Plum blossoms in full bloom signal the coming of spring after the harsh winter, as people live together in harmony: this is the wish that was planted in the name of the era, "Reiwa."

Fukushima Pride fills our hearts as we work together to build a vibrant and appealing future for Fukushima, filled with hope and harmony, where each of us is able to connect person-to-person, and heart-to-heart, so that we can each of us, bloom into our own unique color of life.

March 11, 2020

Uchibori Masao, Governor of Fukushima Prefecture