

A Message from Fukushima on March 11, 2021
“10 Years since the Great East Japan Earthquake: Fukushima Today and Tomorrow”

It has been 10 years since that day. The day when an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster drastically changed our beautiful and peaceful hometowns. We experienced the pain of separation from our loved ones and the fight against invisible radiation.

Children who evacuated and attended temporary schools have now grown up to become adults. On the other hand, there are also children who are still missing and their souls cannot return to their hometowns. Looking back on all these years, I think to myself, “10 years have passed already” yet also, “It has only been 10 years.”

“It was my first time visiting our family grave this summer at the age of 10.”

- Ishida Haru (daughter), Higashiyama Elementary School

“I shared my memories with my daughter for the first time this summer.”

- Ishida Satoshi (father)

For 10 years, we have fought against the division of communities, harmful rumors, and discrimination and prejudice in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster. Now in 2021, the world is facing a catastrophe caused by an invisible virus. Being deprived of freedom and a sense of peace, people around the world are feeling anxious and suffocated. Not only Fukushima, but also the entire world is facing challenging times.

As with 10 years ago, we can no longer take our normal lives for granted and I cannot help but to rethink about what is truly important.

“That day when the tsunami came, we were unable to grab people’s hands and save them from being swept away by the waves. So, in the middle of this current crisis, we need to reach out and never let go of the people being separated from society. I hope for a world where everyone can love themselves and others more. I also want myself to be that way.”

- Hirako Nanami, Aizu Gakuho High School

While surrounded by darkness, we have made progress towards revitalization, one step at a time. The zones placed under evacuation orders due to the nuclear disaster have decreased to one-fifth. Roadways and railways have reopened, and schools and hospitals restarted, gradually calling back those who have evacuated. Research bases for robotics and renewable energies have been established, and sake, fruit and other specialties in Fukushima are once again highly valued. We are regaining our feeling of pride.

On the other hand, more than 30,000 residents have yet to return to their hometowns and there are people struggling with unhealed wounds from the disaster. With the progress of revitalization causing disparities among regions, there are also those who are facing increased loneliness. Memories of the disaster and public interest are fading with the passing of time. In addition, we have just started taking the long path towards the decommissioning of the reactors. After 10 years, we see the reality where the contrast between light and shadow is becoming clearer.

With that said, it is also true that we have grown, become resilient, and built new bonds in the course of revitalization. We have gotten involved and worked together with people whom we would not have met without the disaster occurring. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for the continuous efforts and support from the people of Fukushima and those who have shown their sympathy for Fukushima.

Now, 10 years after the disaster, our progress is being impeded by a new calamity with the coronavirus disease. The Olympics which was supposed to be our golden opportunity to represent our revitalization, the National High School Baseball Championship, and choir competitions were all postponed or canceled.

Despite being discouraged, there are young people who have never given up, saying, “We can’t go on grieving forever,” and “There are still things we can do to pitch in. I want to do whatever I can to help right now.” There are business operators who are looking to create new jobs and initiatives in our regions, local producers who use their ingenuity to overcome negative rumors, new residents who intend to play a role in revitalization, and many others who continue to address the mounting challenges with enthusiasm.

The proud and sincere attitudes of these hardworking and determined people give us a ray of hope. I want to also deliver this hope to people suffering around the world.

“As people still have not yet returned home, this 10th year since the disaster does not mark a turning point. However, I was overwhelmed when I experienced the New Year in my hometown and I am sure that the first step has been taken.”

- Takakura Hirohisa, *Guji* (chief priest) of Shohatsu Shrine, Futaba Town

“I want to play in the sea again.” “I wish I could grow vegetables in my field.” “I hope my family can live together again.” “I want to meet my friends in my hometown.” There are many different wishes for revitalization among people, from children to the elderly. At the center of these desires, there is a shared wish for revitalization where everyone supports each other, keeps moving forward towards the future, and feels true joy and happiness. This is our goal.

“Our hearts have become stronger as we try to overcome the once-in-a-thousand-years earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear accident. There are also people even now who are supporting us around the world. In order to tell them how grateful we are, we have to continue sharing about ourselves.”

- Hotta Saori, Odaka Junior High School (at that time)

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum has recently opened. We want to inform the younger generation who did not experience the disaster about what really happened and also our path towards revitalization. We should not only talk about the past but also where Fukushima is today, and where it will be tomorrow.

Moving towards the future, we are taking a step into the next decade. I promise once again that I will revive our beautiful hometowns and build a future for Fukushima that is vibrant and filled with joy. Let’s create a Fukushima that the next generation of children can be proud of from the bottom of their hearts.

March 11, 2021

UCHIBORI Masao, Governor of Fukushima Prefecture