



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

As delivered

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**Opening Remarks at Soma DRR Symposium
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First of all, thank you very much for your very warm invitation to Soma City and to this important symposium. It is my great pleasure to be with you all here today.

Four years have passed since the earthquake and tsunamis hit this beautiful town. On behalf of my organization, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA, may I express our sincere condolences to those who lost their families, friends, community members and colleagues.

I am now visiting Japan on the occasion of the 3rd United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. This large UN Conference is being held in Sendai and hosted by the Government of Japan. The UN Conference is aiming to agree on a new global framework for Disaster Risk Reduction beyond 2015. While WCDRR is extremely important, I really wanted to take time out of my schedule and come here to convey this simple message to you: The international community has not forgotten about Fukushima, and the United Nations continues to be with the affected families in Japan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Great East Japan Earthquake was a tragic disaster of unprecedented scale and complexity. This morning, I had a chance to see some of the disaster affected areas in Soma, and speak with those who are still living in temporary houses. I was struck by the resilience that people showed. I listened to their survival stories; many of them helped each other at the evacuation centres, and worked together to save as many lives as possible.

The recovery phase has not been straightforward. I am informed that as of the end of last year, some 240,000 people were still displaced nationwide, half of them from Fukushima Prefecture. This includes 80,000 people who lived in areas near Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant where the Government's mandatory evacuation orders are still in place.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My office, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, is responsible for bringing together international humanitarian aid organisations to ensure an effective and coherent response to large-scale emergencies and disasters. OCHA was created about 20 years ago as a

The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.

part of the Secretariat of the United Nations to enable international humanitarian organisations—including governments, UN organisations like UNICEF, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees or the World Food Programme – NGOs such as AAR, Nanmin wo Tasukeru Kai, the Red Cross movement, the private sector and other partners – to work together as effectively as possible to save lives.

OCHA has about 2,000 people working in 50 countries. We not only respond to humanitarian needs caused by natural disasters – earthquakes, tsunamis, volcano eruptions, and floods, but also to try to lessen the humanitarian suffering created by conflicts and other crises such as hunger and malnutrition. Right now we are negotiating access for humanitarian aid in Syria, supporting humanitarian operations to help those affected by food insecurity in the Sahel region of Africa, and coordinating international assistance in countries that are suffering from protracted humanitarian crises, such as Yemen, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We do this through assessing needs and agreeing on priorities; presenting those needs in a clear and strategic plan, so that those paying the bills know where their money is going, making sure that everyone gets the best possible information to make decisions (including the people who have been affected by the crisis), working with governments, UN agencies, the Red Cross, NGOs and others to develop common policies on humanitarian issues, speaking out for people when they can't do so for themselves, and reporting on the latest developments in humanitarian situations around the world. The Emergency Relief Coordinator, the head of OCHA, is responsible for the coordination of all emergencies requiring international humanitarian assistance. That position is now held by Valerie Amos, and I am her deputy.

To support effective implementation of our mandate, OCHA has an office in Kobe that works very closely with the Japanese Government and other humanitarian partners in Japan. This office aims at mobilizing Japanese resources, expertise and institutional capacity to help other countries to respond better to disasters.

During the Great East Japan Earthquake, OCHA sent an expert team to Japan, and supported the Japanese Government by sharing the latest and most accurate information with the international community in English. We coordinated international search and rescue teams that arrived in the Tohoku area; and we advised on how best to manage incoming relief items from overseas.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The unique experience of Fukushima offers many lessons for humanitarian crises, not only to improve Japan's own Disaster Risk Reduction efforts, but also to build a more resilient world. I would like to highlight some of these.

First, investing in prevention and mitigation is vital, but it is not enough to protect people against large scale natural disasters like tsunamis. Preparedness for effective response needs to be promoted at all levels of society and as an integral part of disaster management.

Second, we must take a more comprehensive approach towards anticipating different kinds of hazards, which may be combined in a mega-emergency like the one you experienced. Nuclear plants can pose challenging political problems around radiation risks.

Third, responding to a nuclear disaster makes particular and specific demands on emergency responders and humanitarian workers. They must have sufficient access to critical information

and be fully supplied with the necessary operational and protective equipment. This must be a part of our preparedness.

Fourth, even in a crisis situation, the diverse needs of affected people must be met, especially those of vulnerable groups including women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. Women need to be not only protected but also empowered - particularly by getting involved in decision making processes. This should happen before, during and after disasters.

Finally, in a complex situation like Fukushima, information becomes a critical humanitarian need, and communications with affected communities must be a priority. OCHA works with governments and local authorities to support timely, accurate and appropriate early warning and risk communications. We are always pursuing new ways to communicate; in fact, we recently signed a Humanitarian Connectivity Charter with mobile phone companies that will responders and people affected by crisis. By combining new and old technologies, we can do more to help people make informed decisions at a critical time.

These points are some of OCHA's key messages to the WCDRR in Sendai. I hope you agree with them and look forward to hearing your views during the panel discussion.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Fukushima nuclear disaster is a wake-up call to the world. We are faced with new types of challenges and nobody, in Japan and in the international community, has all the answers. The immediate and long-term impact of radiation, in particular, is hard to overcome entirely, even with the latest technologies.

While the acute life threatening emergency phase is over, the timeframe for attaining 'durable solutions' to the displacement are still not clear. A significant number of people are still in temporary accommodation, waiting to return home. Those who have returned home may continue to face difficulties in rebuilding their lives in stagnating rural economies. Many families are living apart, due to concerns about radiation or because of their education, employment and other requirements.

And the psycho-social impact of the disaster and displacement continues, with the risk that communities may become further divided or isolated. The full impact of radiation on local economies such as fishery and tourism is still unknown.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are all concerned about these problems, but humanitarians alone cannot resolve them. We need long term strategies with creativity and stronger coordination and partnerships - with the government, the private sector, and civil society.

We must continue to uphold the humanitarian principle of humanity in helping people in need; stick to the human rights based approach; and fight against social exclusions and discrimination. While the international community can learn much from Fukushima, people here can take lessons from the international standards and good practices related to emergency relief and recovery assistance.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to touch upon the story of Soma City's courageous fire brigades, who rushed to coastal areas to rescue and help evacuate people. Thanks to their dedication, many lives were saved. However, ten members of the fire brigade – most of them quite young - did not return. These ten are real humanitarian heroes and I pay tribute to each of them today, together with many others.

I hope you also continue to draw strength from the strong 'kizuna' with Japan and the people in Fukushima that the world expressed in the aftermath of the tsunamis. This outpouring of assistance and support from outside Japan demonstrates that we live in a world that is very interconnected. You are not alone.

The United Nations and OCHA will stand by all the affected people in Fukushima and Tohoku, for as long as you need our support.

Thank you.