

Message from Fukushima on March 11th, 2025

“The Great East Japan Earthquake shattered our beautiful landscapes in an instant, turning a world – once vibrant and full of colour – into shades of grey. Fourteen years have passed since that day, and Fukushima has slowly begun to regain its colours, illuminating the future with strength and resilience.”

(Mahiru Suzuki, Haramachi Daiichi Junior High School, “Letter to the Future”)

March 2011. An immense earthquake, an unforgiving tsunami, and the nuclear accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. This unprecedented compound disaster altered our lives in an instant, and even after fourteen years, we continue to face numerous challenges.

Yet, amidst the long and arduous path to revitalization, the tireless efforts of the people of the Prefecture and the warm support from across Japan and around the world have allowed the light of hope in Fukushima to shine ever brighter, guiding us forward.

At the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, athletes with ties to our prefecture inspired and uplifted the people of Fukushima. On this very day, fourteen years ago, badminton players Yuta Watanabe and Arisa Igarashi were among those affected by the disaster in Tomioka Town. They overcame immense hardship and anguish, winning a bronze medal in the Mixed Doubles Badminton competition for the second consecutive Olympic Games and made a triumphant return to the Prefecture. Meanwhile, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany has stood alongside us in promoting the innovation of renewable energy since the nuclear accident. Over the past decade, our ties have strengthened through ongoing, face-to-face exchanges.

And at the TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, the test retrieval of fuel debris from Reactor Unit 2 has begun. The amount extracted—0.7 grams—is a mere fraction of the estimated 880 tons that remain. Yet, it represents a critical breakthrough in our understanding of the reactor's interior, a place whose reality remained unknown for fourteen years.

At the same time, many hardships persist.

Approximately 25,000 people are still unable to return home, forced to remain displaced. Even for those who have returned, the everyday life they once shared with their neighbours is forever lost.

The decommissioning of the nuclear power station is a long-term challenge, and the disposal of decontaminated soil outside the Prefecture remains an unresolved issue. These are unique difficulties brought by the nuclear disaster, and they remain vast and complex.

“Fukushima still has many challenges to overcome. I belong to the first generation that did not experience the earthquake firsthand, so I cannot speak about it personally. But I will do my best, step by step, to support the Prefecture in my own way.”

(Sosuke Yoshida, Shirakawa Daini Junior High School, “Letter to the Future”)

This past November marked 5,000 days since the disaster and nuclear accident.

As the years pass, more and more young people will grow up without memories of that tragic day. It is our responsibility to pass down the lessons learned and the memories so that the same tragedy will never be repeated.

Young people from across Japan and around the world are coming to Fukushima, and deepening their understanding on such matters through disaster education and on-site experiences.

Their willingness to listen to the voices of those who lived through the disaster and to see it as their own concern is, without a doubt, a source of hope for the future.

“May the happiness we have today be carried forward, for as many and as long as possible, into the future.”

(Misaki Endo, Iwashiro Junior High School, “Letter to the Future”)

Those of us who experienced both the earthquake and nuclear accident understand that the everyday lives we lead today should never be taken for granted. We must continue to raise awareness about disaster preparedness and the dangers of believing in the safety myth. At the same time, we must also recognise how far we have come – how, despite every hardship, we have continued to move forward, step by step, supported by those around us.

Last October, we bid farewell to a beloved son of Fukushima, the legendary actor Toshiyuki Nishida. At the entrance of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum, which shares the story of Fukushima’s revitalization, his warm and gentle voice—spoken in the familiar dialect of our home—still echoes today.

He cared more than anybody for the revitalization of his beloved hometown. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, as Fukushima faced devastating reputational damage, he stood before the world and ate our local produce with enthusiasm, reassuring us all.

"No matter what happens, Fukushima will never be defeated! We will reclaim our ‘Utsukushima’, Beautiful Fukushima!"

His voice rang out with unwavering conviction.

With his dogged spirit instilled in our hearts, we shall never falter. We will press forward, undeterred, embracing every challenge that lies ahead.

Next year, Fukushima Prefecture will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding.

We stand here today because of the relentless efforts and fearless determination of those who came before us, who persevered through countless adversities.

I profoundly believe that, years from now, future generations will look back on our time and proudly say, “We are here because they were here.”

With that conviction, we will continue to build a Fukushima filled with smiles—the kind of place Nishida envisioned.

Together, with the people of Fukushima and with everyone who support us, we will add vibrant colours to blueprint of our future and create a bright, prosperous home for generations to come.

March 11th, 2025

UCHIBORI Masao
Governor of Fukushima Prefecture