

2012. 10. 17

Summary of Statement by Azuma KONNO, Senior Vice Minister at 5th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

Introduction

Good morning, everyone. I'm Azuma Konno and am Senior Vice Minister of the Cabinet Office Japan for disaster management. I'm very honored to have this opportunity to make a speech as the representative of Japan.

Integration with Local Level Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation is a crucial issue, therefore Japan deals with the issue with big interest. In order to cope with increasing natural disasters such as typhoon, tornado, storm rainfall, etc., which are affected by climate change, It is important to strengthen capacities of stakeholders for Local Level Disaster Risk Reduction with every aspect, as well as providing quick and precise warnings.

We believe that lessons and learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred in 2011, and many efforts made by Japan will be greatly helpful to strengthen capacities for local disaster management. Therefore, we would like to introduce our trial for your reference.

I am from Miyagi prefecture, which had the most casualties by the Great East Japan Earthquake. When I went down to the regions at the occurrence of the earthquake, I was deeply impressed by the words of an acquaintance that "we had been pursuing too much convenient way of living. We should not rely on economic growth only, but should proceed to the disaster prevention measures which focus on the peoples' lives." His words gave us very important perspective for strengthening local disaster prevention capacities.

Lessons learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake (in light of local disaster prevention capability)

Series of rescue activities and support to affected people have been conducted from just after the Great East Japan Earthquake, but it was revealed that there were some points for reflection. For an example, local municipalities should respond to a disaster when it occurs, but this time, some municipalities could not report the damages to prefectural government and national government since their governmental buildings and staff had been destroyed by the Tsunami. Due to this situations, the prefectural and national governments could not respond that conditions quickly and properly.

As for the Tsunami Alarm, the estimation of the Tsunami height announced by the Japan Meteorological Agency was quite low compared with the actual one, it may be one reason that

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evacuation was not sufficiently carried out. The Tsunami Alarm could not reach citizens in some area because information and communication infrastructure was disrupted by the earthquake.

In addition, evacuation was not performed adequately due to over-dependence on structures such as breakwater and embankment. Taking into possibilities of occurrence of unexpected large scale Tsunami, it is important to minimize damages, making use of usual evacuation drills, as well as utilizing both structural and non-structural disaster prevention measures.

On the other hand, disaster prevention efforts led in good result in some cases. The damages of buildings were relatively small due to promotion of anti-seismic design and anti-seismic reinforcement, in spite of its wide suffered area and class 6-7 of Japanese seismic intensity of the Earthquake. The early earthquake detection system worked very well that all running bullet train could stop safely without casualty. In addition, where usual disaster education and drills had been carried out, in that case, they could reduce damages minimum.

Regarding recover, the roads leading to the disaster area were cut off in many points when the earthquake occurred, but 4 days after the earthquake, the emergency transport routes were secured by the rapid public-private cooperation. As for the bullet train, after the 49 days of the earthquake, whole lines were rehabilitated and operation was resumed normally. Major ports also recovered their quay functions of by 13 days.

○Japan Action based on lessons learned (to strengthen local disaster prevention capability)

Based on lessons learned from the earthquake, we are going to promote effective measures as well as to review and revise of the “Disaster Countermeasures Basic Act” and “Basic Disaster Management Plan”. For example, “the Act” regulates that prefectures should gather information proactively when a disaster occurs. And also it guides prefectures to include the point of mutual cooperation and acceptance of affected people into local disaster management policy which are made by prefectures.

We’ve decided to promote carrying out the disaster prevention drills, delivering lessons learned from the disaster to younger generation, and giving education in normal times. Meanwhile, in order to respond the needs of women and disabled persons when disaster occurs, the scheme to hear opinions by multi stakeholders can be possible from the beginning stage of disaster prevention planning. Disaster prevention framework should be strengthened, through the collaboration with local government offices, local communities, private enterprises, and NGOs, by giving disaster prevention education and providing its drills.

On the other hand, we also know the importance that the urban development plan, as well as its sustainable management, should be moved forward systematically through the promotion of earthquake-resistance buildings, the maintenance of flood control facilities, the service of safer transport operation, and the enhancement of information & communication base.

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Furthermore, as for strengthening the local level disaster prevention capacity, the effective utilization of latest science technologies should be taken into consideration, such as delivery of more sophisticated disaster information using artificial satellite or information & communication technologies.

Conclusion (Promotion of Streamlining of disaster prevention, Initiative of post IFA discussion)

With much concern of the bad influence by climate change, the commitment focusing on “People’s Life” is crucial in order to perform such measures at local community level. We should promote “mainstreaming of disaster prevention” which is to be considered in every policies as well as build a resilient society.

We understand that our most important mission is to deliver the findings and lessons got from the past catastrophes, including the Great East Japan Earthquake. To do it, Japan will keep on performing information dispatch relating to disaster prevention proactively, and make efforts in order to call much attention to disaster prevention from every countries, and, move continuously forward to promote HFA actions. Incidentally, I’m from Miyagi prefecture, where is one of the affected areas by the Earthquake. In this month, high-level Minister Conference “World Disaster Prevention Conference in Tohoku” was held at Miyagi, and Japan addressed our country is going to support 3 billion dollars from 2013 for 3 years for disaster prevention.

In addition, Japan is going to proactively join the discussion of post HFA starting from 2016. In this connection, we are expressing to invite every country to Japan for the 3rd United Nations Disaster Reduction Worldwide Conference to be held in 2015.

Through such actions, Japan wants to reciprocate to all of the countries’ favors given to us at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Thank you so much for listening to me.

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