

The speech of Mr. Takayama, President, at the 43rd CITRA

Save the Disaster-stricken Archives! : From Devastation to the Discovery of Hope for Tomorrow

2011.10.20

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Thank you, Mr. Bertland,

Good morning ! Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to introduce myself. I am Takayama, President of the National Archives of Japan. I am filled with deep emotion to be here today in Toledo, a city rich in history and cultural assets, to report on what happened at the Great Earthquake in March this year.

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At two forty-six (2:46) P.M. on March eleventh (11), two thousand eleven (2011), the eastern half of Japan was stricken by a catastrophic earthquake. Its magnitude was nine point zero (9.0), the fourth strongest earthquake ever recorded in world history.

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Thirty minutes after the earthquake hit, the biggest tsunami in the history of Japan struck the Pacific coast. This earthquake and tsunami on an unprecedented scale destroyed a huge number of coastal buildings and port facilities, and liquefaction phenomena were reported from a vast

range of the coastal areas. Approximately twenty thousand (20,000) persons were missing or perished in the earthquake and tsunami, and total financial damage is estimated at sixteen trillion and nine hundred billion (16,900,000,000,000) yen. This is equivalent to about two hundred and twenty (220) billion U.S. dollars.

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Despite the dedicated efforts of the heroes of Fukushima, the Daiichi Nuclear Power Station of Fukushima lost its emergency power, resulting in a very serious nuclear power plant disaster, and obliging many residents in the nearby towns and villages to evacuate.

The Japanese government named this earthquake, the Great East Japan Earthquake. It truly was a once-in-a-millennium disaster, and for the Japanese people, it affected their values or even their way of life.



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Haruki Murakami, the world-famous writer, who visited this country in June this year, said in his speech in Barcelona that “Japanese people have always lived with a sense of the 'mujo'." The sense of 'mujo' is a Buddhist world view. It means everything in the world is destined to disappear someday and nothing in the world is unchanging or eternal. Throughout

history, Japanese people have been exposed to so many disasters that they have come to accept them as inevitable. Moreover, in a way, they learned to survive by overcoming difficulties with a forward-looking attitude. Destroyed houses can be rebuilt, damaged roads can be repaired, and even devastated cities can be restored. Many of us are aware that this is the time when the whole country should stand up for restoration and reformation.

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Now, I would like to speak about "Initiatives of the National Archives of Japan" towards the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Soon after the great earthquake, the National Archives posted a message of condolence to the victims on our website in my name.

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Since then, we have been giving the maximum possible support and have engaged in activities reflecting requests from the stricken area.

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For example, in September, the National Archives launched a project for the restoration of stricken public documents in response to a request from Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture.

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The project was organized in 13 days. We sent nine staff members to Miyako, provided the necessary equipment and supplies free of charge, hired part-time staff for this local restoration work and gave technical training to them. In total, 5,036 (five thousand and thirty-six) sheets of water-damaged documents were repaired. We plan to start the new operation for the restoration of stricken public documents following this project.



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Next is about the Initiatives of the Japanese Government.

On the whole, the Japanese government did recognize the need to preserve a record of this disaster from an early stage. The Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary issued instructions that each ministry must carefully preserve the records and materials of the facts and processes of the great earthquake as provisions against disasters that may occur in future.

After one month since the disaster, the Reconstruction Design Council was established under the Prime Minister to discuss the direction of comprehensive reconstruction; the result of which was to be reflected in concrete guidelines. The Council submitted a recommendation to the

Prime Minister under the title of: Towards Reconstruction “Hope beyond the Disaster”.

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This recommendation contained the Seven Principles for the Reconstruction Framework, the first of which stated that: “For us, the surviving, there is no other starting point for the path to recovery than to remember and honor the many lives that have been lost. Accordingly we shall record the disaster for eternity” Thus it highlighted the importance of the preservation and inheritance of records as well as their being a source of information.

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In June, the Basic Guidelines for Reconstruction in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake was determined. It presented a plan for the next decade, which was designated as a period for reconstruction. In the Guidelines, the policies related to repairing, conserving and preserving records and archives were included. Moreover, digitalization of related materials is promoted, and so is formulation of a structure for the unified preservation and utilization of such records, which should be made accessible to everyone, both nationally and internationally, and disseminated worldwide.



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In the meanwhile, archival institutions and individuals have also actively been participating in the preservation activities.

Immediately after the disaster, the Japan Society of Archives Institutions (JSAI), an ICA B member, started researching the state of damage in all member associations nationwide, and reported the results on its website.

It also requested the rescue and preservation of damaged materials and disaster-related documents to the Prime Minister and the Conference of Governors.

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Drawing on its experience from the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995, the Cultural Affairs Agency established the Cultural Property Rescue Program 20 days after the earthquake. A full-scale operation got underway to conserve cultural properties, in which the JSAI participated as a member institution.

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Researchers from private sectors also stood up to help. Since the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995, university faculties and students, staff of archival institutions, and historical researchers have joined hands to form groups called "Shiryō Net" and worked as volunteers to rescue and

conserve historical records and archives stricken by the disasters. One of such groups, the Miyagi Shiryo Net, a Network for Preserving Historical Materials, has been operating remarkably in Miyagi Prefecture, one of the heavily-stricken areas.



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Up to now, I have reviewed post-disaster measures taken in these 7 months. Before closing, I would like to discuss three challenges we face today.

The first challenge is the conservation and preservation of damaged records and archives. One of the lessons we learned from the rescue and conservation of water-damaged materials was the need to establish something similar to "triage" in emergency medical service. Given the huge volume of materials damaged all at once, and a serious shortage of restoration staff and facilities, archivists were obliged to urgently evaluate, select and decide the priority of the damaged historical materials to be rescued. We will continue to work on the restoration and preservation of stricken materials and we would like to request support from global experts.

The second challenge is the review of disaster prevention measures related

to records and materials. When electricity was lost for many days over a very wide range, the restoration of digital documents surfaced as another problem. To establish disaster prevention measures related to vital records and records in various media, our prime task is to examine the damage from this disaster in depth and engage in surveys and research into disaster prevention.

The third challenge is the issue of collecting, preserving and disclosing the disaster record. I believe it is our duty to continue to maintain and pass down the record of the disaster for the next millennium and share what we have experienced with people around the world.



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Hundreds of thousands of people in the stricken area lost their beloved family members and friends. They lost the places where they were born and they had grown up. The Self Defense Force, the first rescue troops that arrived in the stricken area to remove and dispose of rubble, voluntarily delivered many pictures and albums they found during its operations to evacuation shelters. What people wanted to find from the heap of rubble were not bank check books, money or valuables. What they sought were objects of memory such as family pictures, graduation certificates, letters,

or diaries. When everything was lost, the only thing a person wanted for the hope to live for tomorrow was archives as evidence of his or her life, or of the community in which he or she lived.



I am most grateful to you for giving me the opportunity to give my report here at CITRA as president of the National Archives of Japan. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to ICA colleagues for their warm messages of encouragement on the occasion of the disaster. I hope I will be able to organize sessions on the Great East Japan Earthquake with many Japanese archivists and conservators at the ICA Congress 2012 in Brisbane.

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We all know that in the world of reality, nothing lasts forever. Based on the philosophy of “the 'mujo' of life” whereby all things are destined to change, we believe that things created by man may once be destroyed but can nevertheless be restored.

We gratefully acknowledge our deep appreciation to all of you in the world for giving us a supportive push toward reconstruction through bonds of solidarity. I sincerely hope to make the path to restoration full of hope for tomorrow

Thank you very much for your attention.