

A Message from Fukushima on March 11, 2022

It has been eleven years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and the subsequent nuclear disaster. The road which traverses the Prefecture has been fully opened, while Fukushima's sake accomplished an impressive feat by breaking its own record of having the most number of gold awards for consecutive years in Japan. Also, "Fuku Warai", the top rice brand of the Prefecture, made a full debut and the volume of Fukushima's exports of agricultural products reached a record high. The light shining towards revitalization is becoming brighter.

However, there are still many people who are experiencing hard times and living away from their hometowns. Sometimes, I am also faced with the reality that the impression of Fukushima from both within and outside of Japan has not changed. I truly believe that a lot of things have happened to each and every person of the Prefecture during the past year.

“Visible revitalization is slowly yet steadily progressing. Revitalization of hearts is progressing differently for each person, depending on where they have lived and how much they have suffered. Supporting each other with warm feelings will become a driving force in revitalizing broken hearts. Only our human hearts are able to support other human hearts.”

- *Nanaka Sato, Haramachi High School*

As the COVID-19 pandemic is being fought hard around the world, we have never realized more than now the importance of emotional warmth from people and caring for each other.

Amid our hardships since that day, we have received encouragement from many people who support Fukushima, which has become a great strength for us to keep going. I greatly appreciate the bonds that we have made over the years, and will continue to cherish them further.

I hope more people could get to know and actually see the current

situation of Fukushima in order for them to make connections and create new bonds. It is my wish that these bonds will be further deepened in harmony and unison.

Regarding the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games held last summer, I think it was truly unfortunate that we lost the opportunity to show people the current situation of Fukushima. As matches were held without spectators, we were not able to invite many people to Fukushima. On the other hand, the Olympic flame lit up our hope for revitalization as it departed from the J-Village National Training Center, which served as a frontline base of operations to deal with the nuclear accident, and the torch was able to tour around the Prefecture. At Tokyo's National Stadium, the flame fueled by hydrogen produced in Namie Town shined the world with hope, while wishing all the players the best. Players on the Japan National Baseball Team and Women's National Softball Team performed outstandingly and won all the games held at the Fukushima Azuma Baseball Stadium. This became a great stepping

stone to winning the gold medals. We also received praise from overseas players and staff for the deliciousness of our products and for our hospitality. I will connect and deepen this Olympic legacy to our next exchanges.

“Many people are experiencing tough times while yearning for their hometowns. Even so, they are desperately trying to stay positive. We must not forget such people.”

- *Eimi Shishido, Asaka Kaisei High School*

While there are still more than 30,000 residents who have yet to return to their hometowns, this year, evacuation orders will be lifted in some of the off-limit areas including Futaba Town, where all residents were forced to evacuate.

We can see that time has begun to move again.

As we try to return things back to the way they were while also integrating the creation of new things, I believe we can overcome any adversity if we persevere and continue to make an effort to

regain everyday life in our hometowns.

I will be there alongside the people who at their own pace are trying to overcome difficulties as well as continuing to take on challenges which give shape to their thoughts and feelings, one step at a time.

“Currently, I want to increase activities based in Fukushima that make people smile. I’m still not certain how to do it, but I do want to become an adult who thinks about how to bring joy to the people around me and take action.”

- *Mion Kikuchi, Funehiki High School*

Since that day, it must not have been a smooth path for the children who were still young back then. Having watched the adults face and try to overcome the disaster, these children have become inspired and have grown up to be promising youths who are looking solidly to the future. A new future of Fukushima will be created by passing the baton to the next generation who will rise up to the challenge.

“Why don’t we remove this “Fukushima” label and try to actually see and appreciate the prefecture? If it’s about Fukushima food and products, we consider the environment and the people that grew and created them. If it’s about the Fukushima people, we should think about what they have experienced as well as their thoughts and feelings. First, I think we should focus on each of these points.”

- Moeri Nogi, Aizu Gakuho High School

Currently, the international community has set 17 common goals, known as the SDGs, and is committed to making an effort in passing on a sustainable society to the next generation.

Fukushima’s initiatives have been to fully overcome the unprecedented compound disaster, regain our irreplaceable hometowns, and properly pass them on to the future generation.

They are an embodiment of the philosophy of the SDGs. I will set the revitalization of Fukushima as the 18th goal for the Prefecture

which is tackling individual issues. I will convey that this goal can also contribute to the world as a message of hope from Fukushima.

Looking towards the future, I will share Fukushima Pride with the young people and children of the next generation. I believe we will be able to definitely achieve revitalization. I also promise that I will further advance and strive for revitalization, one step at a time with the people of the Prefecture.

March 11, 2022

UCHIBORI Masao

Governor of Fukushima Prefecture