

Tohoku-Pacific Ocean Earthquake

On Friday 11 March at 2.46pm (Japan Standard Time), a massive earthquake of magnitude 9 occurred off the east coast of Tohoku as the northern part of Japan's main island is known. The earthquake is the largest in Japan's recorded history.

The Japanese Meteorological Agency named the earthquake the 平成23年東北地方太平洋沖地震 or "2011 off the Pacific Coast of Tohoku Earthquake".

Damage

The earthquake and the following tsunami which arrived shortly after the 9.0 quake caused devastating damage in human and physical terms. While some damage occurred in the Kanto region, by far the most severe damage was inflicted on the Tohoku region.

As of 29 March, the number of confirmed deaths was 11,082 people, the number of injured 2,778 and the number of missing 16,717 (according to the National Police Agency of Japan). The National Police Agency estimates there are approximately 180,800 evacuees as of 28 March.

In the Tohoku district and other regions, electricity, gas and water are disconnected in many areas. Roads, railways, airports and other infrastructure were severely

damaged. Currently, the whole of Japan is working for the post-disaster rehabilitation. Lifeline services are gradually recovering.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan declared the earthquake, tsunami and the situation at the Fukushima nuclear reactors to be the worst crisis in the 65 years since WWII. He also said, "If the nation works together, we will overcome."

Assistance and sympathy from abroad

Japan has received offers of sympathy and assistance from many countries and international organisations.

Australia was among the first to offer support. Prime Minister Kan had a telephone talk with Prime Minister Julia Gillard, and Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto similarly spoke with Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd. Australia quickly dispatched a rescue team which was among teams from 20 countries and regions. Australia's C17 aircraft has been providing transportation assistance in Japan and urgently transported a special pump needed for cooling Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

NGOs, private companies and individuals around the world have extended or offered numerous donations and/or assistance.

Keeping informed

Many ministries and levels of government are working together to cope with the situations caused by the earthquake and tsunami. The following websites are good points for readers to find information.

The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** has a thorough *Tohoku-Pacific Ocean Earthquake* page which is posting recent announcements, information about confirming safety of foreign nationals in Japan, the Fukushima nuclear power stations and radiation concerns, and related links: www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/incidents/index.html

For Australians considering travel in Japan, refer to **DFAT's Smartraveller** website www.smartraveller.gov.au for the Australian government's most recent travel advisory. The **Japan National Travel Organisation's** Sydney office has postings on the state of transportation and issues affecting travel on their website: www.jnto.org.au

Our consulate website also has updates and information about fund-raising activities happening locally:

www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp

Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program—

JETs in Japan at the time of the Tohoku-Pacific Ocean Earthquake

CLAIR (the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations) which looks after the JET Program in Japan was happily able to report that contact had been made with all Australian JETs working in Japan by 14 March.

However, it was very sad to hear of the untimely passing of a JET from the USA who was a victim of the tsunami. Another still remains missing at the time of writing. The thoughts of the JET community are with their family and friends.

Japan's New Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Takeaki Matsumoto was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs on 9 March. Mr Matsumoto had previously served as State Secretary for Foreign Affairs (equivalent to 'deputy minister') in

the Reshuffled Kan Cabinets. His appointment followed the resignation of Mr Seiji Maehara on 7 March. For Minister Matsumoto's profile, see: www.mofa.go.jp/about/hq/profile/matsumoto.html

