



# *The Great East Japan Earthquake*

A story of a devastating natural disaster,  
a tale of human compassion

**11 March 2011**



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## Foreword

11 March 2011 will always be remembered as the day when we were confronted by one of the worst disasters of our generation. For the global community, it was a day of disbelief, as we witnessed families and communities being swept away. For the Japanese people, it was a day of fear and uncertainty. For individuals and communities in the disaster areas, it was a day of great loss.

*I had a surreal experience during my visit to the disaster area -- I have seen the extent of the damage to families and communities, but my mind could never understand how people could cope with such devastation. I only knew at that instant, that my heart was mourning with the Japanese people, and sharing their hope for recovery and rebuilding.*

More than a story about the loss of lives, missing loved ones and uncertain futures, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake was a tale of a country rising above the challenge of a natural disaster, and an international community acting on the basis of its human compassion.

This publication was produced for the people of Japan, especially those whose lives have been affected by this disaster. This consolidation of the information was generated by a team of professionals based in the Western Pacific Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO). We hope this publication will serve as a useful reference when documenting lessons learnt from the Japan disaster, and will become a tool for both Japan and the international community for future disaster response efforts.

It is important to highlight that the main sources of information for this publication were the Situation Reports published by the

WHO Regional Office at that time, which were based not only on official information but also on media reports in Japanese. A team of dedicated volunteers assisted with data retrieval and translation, capturing the nuance of the culture and the information being reported.

The data collected were supplemented with first-hand information collected from the areas affected by the earthquake and tsunami during two field missions conducted by staff of the WHO Regional Office.

As the long-term recovery activities continue in Japan, WHO continues its health situation monitoring and the accumulation of knowledge and experiences in health system and service recovery following a massive disaster event. Hopefully, we will have more information to share as we continue to work with the Japanese people in the recovery stage.

On the first anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, WHO dedicates this publication to the people of Japan, and those who have shared their time, resources and talents to turn a disaster into a story of a new beginning.



**Shin Young-soo, M.D., Ph.D.**  
Regional Director



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