

## **Statement by the Mayor of Fukushima City (Words of Remembrance on the 15th Anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster)**

Today marks fifteen years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster. I extend my deepest condolences and sympathy to those who lost loved ones, and to all that continue to face various hardships due to the disaster.

On that day, Fukushima City was struck by a violent shaking measuring intensity 6 on the seismic intensity scale, causing widespread power outages and water supply disruptions throughout the city. Amid the bitter cold, long lines formed for gasoline and food. As radio broadcasts relayed news of the tsunami and the nuclear power plant accident, a period of speechlessness ensued. It was a time when the word “anxiety” could not even begin to describe how everyone felt.

At the same time, Fukushima City was also welcoming evacuees. People who fled with only the clothes on their backs from disaster-stricken areas, such as the Hamadori region, were accepted at evacuation centers within the city. Despite insufficient water and electricity, citizens took the initiative to organize food distributions and provide supplies, supporting one another. It was a place overflowing with the warm spirit of genuine mutual support.

On the other hand, some people decided to evacuate outside the city due to concerns about radiation, while others chose to remain in Fukushima despite their anxieties. Others chose to live apart from their families. The profound conflict and suffering they endured at the time will surely remain in the hearts of every Fukushima citizen, as part of their memories of the disaster. Even now, approximately 2,000 people continue to live outside the city. They too, are vital Fukushima citizens who experienced the disaster firsthand.

We must also never forget the immense support we received from both within Japan and abroad. Fukushima City stands where it is today thanks to the human and material assistance provided by municipalities nationwide and countries around the world, and the unwavering support of all those who gave their utmost on the front lines of recovery and reconstruction. We must continue to hold deep gratitude for the support we received. Building a better future for Fukushima City is the responsibility of us who live in the present.

Fifteen years have passed since the earthquake and tsunami. Yet the memories and lessons learned are by no means things of the past. Fukushima City will continue to learn from this experience and steadily advance our efforts toward disaster prevention and mitigation. We believe that doing our utmost to pass on even a fraction of the kindness received from across Japan and the world is what Fukushima City can do, and that it can contribute to making the disaster-prone Japan resilient and strong.

At the time of the earthquake, I was in my last year of high school. That experience led me to my current path as Mayor of Fukushima City. From now on, more and more people in generations younger than mine will be those who do not know about the disaster. That is precisely why we must move beyond the reconstruction phase and boldly forge ahead into the next era. We learned to not just look back, but to also incorporate the value gained from these lessons into our daily lives. We must make disaster preparedness not something special, but something naturally ingrained in our lives. We must become a kind city where mutual support is the norm, and where each person's individuality is recognized and valued. Sharing these tangible and intangible lessons is the very embodiment of what we learned from the disaster, and it is our shared pride.

As the capital city of Fukushima Prefecture, Fukushima City bears the responsibility to lead the reconstruction of the entire prefecture and spearhead new challenges, working hand in hand with all regions within the prefecture. We will embrace March 11 not as a memory of the past, but as nourishment for the future, and move forward together with each of our 260,000 citizens.

March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Fukushima City Mayor    Baba Yuki