

In memory of 3.11

When I waked up in the morning of that Friday 11.3.2011 and headed to my work at the University of Tokyo, I did not expect it to turn into a historical day for me as well as for millions of people in Japan and across the globe. It was quite a normal day until that moment, 2:46 pm, when everything around us started shaking. I experienced the strongest and scariest earthquake in my life.

In our office on the second floor, we found ourselves seeking shelter first under the tables, and then we got out of the office and the building following the emergency rules we periodically learn and practice at our institute as it is the case in all schools and companies across the country. Amazingly, within only few minutes after the major quake the special trained members at the University of Tokyo were evacuating the buildings and guiding people to the evacuation zone on campus dedicated for such emergencies. They organized the crowds and instructed us how to react as the aftershocks kept striking for hours after the main quake. Also within a short time, helicopters were wandering in the skies above us in an obvious emergency mission. Later we were allowed to enter the cafeteria where we were supplied with water and other drinks and finally after we were given permission to leave, we started our long journey back home which took us much more than usual due to the heavy traffic.

In the few days that followed, it became clear how disastrous the situation was: big damage in the north east coastal area mainly caused by the tsunami which followed that violent earthquake, a crippled nuclear plant in Fukushima imposing danger of radiation leak in addition to the continuous aftershocks. Yet all this could not hinder the strong feelings of love and hope manifested in the responsible reaction of the Japanese people to that disaster. People remained calm and united doing their best to support and relief each other and greatly cooperated to save resources of food, water and other supplies in addition to electricity as I witnessed by myself. It all showed how trained Japanese people are in handling such disasters and how responsible and caring they are for each other and their country. The events also proved the reliability of the Japanese infrastructure especially in Tokyo where everything from buildings to railways and other facilities is carefully designed to survive strong earthquakes. I imagine if the same earthquake and tsunami happened in another country, like Lebanon for example, the result would have been much more catastrophic than what we saw in Japan.

Today, four years after that tragic event we pray for all who were affected and we hope that the lessons learned from that event will help face similar disasters more effectively in the future. Despite all what happened, I continue to live and work in Japan, one of the best countries in the world!

Dr. Walid Malaeb

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