

International Symposium on Water and Disasters
Statement by Mr. Norikazu Suzuki
Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs

His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

To begin, I wish to extend my deepest condolences to the people and Government of Indonesia. Our thoughts go especially to the relatives and loved ones of those who lost their precious lives, and to all those injured and affected by the Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami on September 28.

Water-related disasters are not limited to tsunamis. In recent years, climate change has multiplied water-related disasters such as floods, landslides and droughts. Almost 90% of the people affected by global natural disasters are victims of such water-related disasters.

Japan has experienced a number of water-related disasters in the past. That is one of the reasons why it has been leading the way in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction on a global level. The international community's disaster responses so far have centered on post-disaster measures and are now shifting to disaster risk reduction. The Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in the tsunami-affected city of Sendai in northern Japan in March 2015 clearly stipulated this point of view. This was followed by the adoption of the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, which identifies disaster risk reduction as an important element of development.

In December 2015, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously decided to designate November 5 as "World Tsunami Awareness Day" as a result of the initiative of Japan. The Day has its origin in a famous anecdote in Japan known as "Inamura-no-hi" (the burning of rice sheaves). In 1854, when a huge tsunami hit Japan, Goryo Hamaguchi, a leader of a small village in Wakayama prefecture, set fire to his own rice sheaves to guide the people of the village to higher ground, thus saving their lives. After the disaster, Goryo took steps to make the village more resilient to natural disasters, which is a concept of "Build Back Better" by investing in sea walls that would protect the villagers from tsunamis in the future. Promoting investment in disaster risk reduction is important for protecting the people's lives from tsunamis and other natural disasters.

I would like to underline that the most important aspect of disaster risk reduction is to foster an understanding of the dangers of tsunamis and the proper responses to them among as many people as possible and to encourage them to work together to reduce the risks posed by tsunamis. To share such measures with children around the world, who will shape the future, Japan is working together with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). At the beginning of this month, Japan hosted the Third High School Students Summit on World Tsunami Awareness Day in Wakayama, attended by high school students from 48 countries.

Resilience against water-related disasters is an urgent issue for all of humanity. The United Nations has designated a ten-year span starting in 2018 as the International Decade for Action on “Water for Sustainable Development”. During the coming ten years, Japan intends to step up its contribution to the world regarding water and disaster prevention.

I would like to conclude by expressing my hope that this symposium will contribute to decreasing the risk of water-related disasters and to pushing forward towards the achievement of SDG6 and other water-related targets.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.