

Message from Fukushima on March 11th, 2026

Fifteen years have now passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster.

How old were you at the time?

And for those who had not yet been born, how old were your fathers and mothers then?

When the passage of time is measured in our age, it weighs heavily upon us.

March 11th, 2011.

The disaster claimed countless precious lives and irrevocably altered every single aspect of our peaceful daily life.

Days were spent struggling, our mental clocks unable to keep up with the relentless flow of reality, as anxiety and inner conflict consumed us amid a compound disaster of unprecedented scale and ever-shifting circumstances.

Yet, we continued to move forward step by step, together, and have shaped the Fukushima of today.

The unwavering resolve to never give up, and the warmth to encourage each other are the “Fukushima Pride” that we have garnered.

“Has Fukushima Prefecture achieved full revitalization and become a place where people can live with peace of mind? I really hope so. May the three regions of Fukushima – the Coastal, Central, and Aizu regions – be filled with smiles in the future.”

(ISHII Ryusei, Tamura Municipal Miyakoji Junior High School)

Could we possibly have imagined the Fukushima of today 15 years ago?

The amount of area where the evacuation orders were in place

once reached 12% of the prefecture's land but has now been reduced to 2.2%.

Even in areas where return was long considered inconceivable, by the efforts made to restore the environment, and to rebuild infrastructure, housing, and access to medical care and shopping, everyday life is gradually returning.

Despite the headwinds to industry in the evacuation areas, a growing number of companies are taking on the challenge of solving issues through the Fukushima Innovation Coast Framework.

At a prefectural level, the exports of agricultural products, inflows of new residents and tourist arrivals have all reached record highs. We are heading toward a Fukushima filled with smiles, and the light is steadily and unmistakably growing brighter.

At the same time, there are a number of people who remain unable to return to their hometowns.

As evacuation orders continue, there are places where time appears to have stood still.

Even after returning to their hometowns, quite a few people feel a deepening sense of loneliness when they think of how lively it once was.

While approximately 4,000 people are working tirelessly every day on the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station decommissioning project, it is a profoundly difficult and lengthy undertaking.

Less than 19 years remain until the legally mandated deadline for the removed soil and other materials stored at the Interim Storage Facility to be finally disposed of outside the prefecture, and yet we have not reached a stage where the people of the prefecture can feel at ease.

Reputational damage arising from the nuclear disaster continues

to leave a lasting impact on the entire prefecture, and exceptional efforts are required for Fukushima to stand on the same starting line as other regions.

Mounting challenges remain unresolved, and regrettably, this unprecedented compound disaster is an ongoing reality.

Furthermore, the passage of 15 years confronts us with another serious challenge: fading memory of the disaster.

Many people lost someone dear to them and so many things they cared about. Because of that, I felt it wasn't right for me to stay unaware of what happened.

(MORI Ayana, Minamisoma Municipal Kashima Junior High School)

Having experienced the disaster, it is our responsibility to pass on to our children who will shape the future a baton of memories and lessons that must never be forgotten.

We must not give up as we look toward the future.

We can continue to move forward by supporting each other.

There is no such thing as absolute safety, and we must expect the unexpected without being bound by preconceived notions, and prepare accordingly.

And, above all, we must protect our own lives.

The unique and beautiful scenery and culture of Fukushima Prefecture will be passed down to future generations, and young people will shape the future of this prefecture with hope and pride. I sincerely wish for a bright future for Fukushima— one where past pain is transformed into strength, and where it becomes a symbol of revitalization; one where everyone can live with a smile.

(KANNO Akito, Nihonmatsu Municipal Iwashiro Junior High School)

TABEI Junko, the first recipient of the Fukushima Prefectural Honor Award and a renowned mountaineer, climbed Mount Fuji after the disaster, together with high school students while battling illness. Through her own actions she taught them that, “by moving forward one step at a time, one will surely reach the summit.”

The path toward revitalization will continue to be long and arduous.

“One step at a time.”

With her legacy held deep in our hearts, we will look ahead and move forward, step by step, guided by a spirit of “kindness” that considers the pace of others.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of Fukushima Prefecture. To those who overcame countless hardships to build the prefecture of today, to the people of the prefecture who, even in dire circumstances, never gave up and kept pushing themselves, and to all those, both in Japan and around the world, who have kept Fukushima close to their hearts and continued to walk alongside us.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of you at this very moment. Joining together our hearts and our strength, we will continue to take on new challenges.

On this 15th anniversary, I hereby pledge that we will, without fail, build a Fukushima filled with hope and smiles.

March 11, 2026

UCHIBORI Masao
Governor of Fukushima Prefecture

TABEI Junko

Born in 1939 in Miharu Town, Fukushima Prefecture, TABEI was a leading Japanese mountaineer. In 1975, she became the first woman in the world to summit Mount Everest, and later the first woman to climb the highest peaks on all seven continents. She was also dedicated to protecting mountain environments. In 1991, she became the first recipient of the Fukushima Prefectural Honor Award. In her later years, despite illness, she continued to inspire high school students in Tohoku through climbs of Mount Fuji after they were affected by Great East Japan Earthquake. (Passed away in 2016)