

# **Towards Multilateral Framework of Assistance in Disaster Relief**

**By SUGIURA Masaaki**

It has not been so long since the Sicuan Earthquake happened in May 12. Now Prime Minister FUKUDA Yasuo should take leadership in making a multilateral agreement mainly with Asian countries on mutual assistance in the event of a disaster, including an immediate dispatch of Emergency Rescue Team. In addition, Mr. FUKUDA should put disasters in China and Myanmar on the agenda of G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit to be held in July 2008 and discuss how to take emergency measures for disasters. It is regrettable that the Japanese International Rescue Team was allowed to start their activities after more than 72 hours had passed, which is regarded as the deadline for survival of victims. Therefore, although they were the earliest team to arrive there, they could not make the best use of their advanced specialties to rescue victims. If the Rescue Team had been dispatched as soon as the earthquake occurred, many lives could have been saved.

Japan is the country where a lot of disasters occur and has the world's highest level of techniques to rescue victims of earthquake, typhoon, and tsunami and so forth, especially compared with other Asian countries. However, in the case of China, the dispatch of disaster relief mission was requested four days after the earthquake occurred. In the case of Myanmar's cyclone which caused about 130,000 fatalities and missing persons, the Myanmar government has not yet requested the dispatch of disaster relief mission. It is because each country is cautious about accepting the Emergency Rescue Team from foreign countries as well as because their unnecessary pride has become a hurdle for that. But, it is a matter of human lives. Therefore, we need to respond from the humanitarian perspective and take extralegal measures beyond the international politics and diplomacy. There should be an agreement or consultations on a regular basis among countries concerned so that the Rescue Team can be dispatched immediately after a disaster happens. Needless to say, such consultations will create mutual trust, and then will restrain emotional conflicts among people.

Looking at responses to the Japanese Rescue Team from Chinese media as well as general public, including their messages on the internet, it seems that the Team has unexpectedly brought a good neighborly friendship between Japan and China. Mr. FUKUDA should not miss this chance. He should take the initiative in establishing a system in Asia by which we can respond quickly to disasters. It can start as a bilateral agreement with China or South Korea. Or it can be a treaty organization among ASEAN, Japan, China and Korea, or further expanding to include the US and Australia. In

such an agreement, emergency measures, mid-term measures, and long-term measures need to be differentiated. Emergency measures should include 1) a dispatch of Emergency Assistance Team composed of the Rescue Team, doctors, and nurses immediately after a disaster occurs, 2) permitting a dispatch only with a notification to a recipient country, 3) a timely dispatch of helicopter and aircraft according to the size of a disaster, and 4) providing an afflicted country with information of satellite photos and so on.

The mid-term measures should include 1) a continued and expanded provision of medical support, 2) providing tents and prefabricated housings, and 3) offering know-how of rebuilding infrastructures. As the long-term measures, Japan should take leadership in holding a workshop for training and education regularly in order to improve capabilities of member countries to respond to emergencies. Furthermore, Japan should take an active role in transferring its know-how of disaster-drill in which local governments and private companies participate, which will enhance the public awareness of disasters in each country. The technique of building earthquake-resilient houses should also be transferred. It is obvious that we can develop mutual trust among member countries by taking these measures institutionally and regularly, which will make it possible for us to respond to disasters quickly. Japan is the only country which can take the initiative to make such an agreement. Mr. FUKUDA should pay more attention to Asia where natural disasters frequently strike, and present a grand design of emergency response system as soon as possible. Needless to say, the G8 Summit is a great opportunity to make such an effort. Heads of some Asian countries, including China, as well as of G8 member countries participate in the coming Summit. Therefore Mr. FUKUDA should put measures for natural disasters as well as environmental issues on the agenda of G8 Summit and try to reach a broad consensus to conclude an agreement.

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