

3/11 survivors to attend U.N. disaster summit

Japanese and Filipino students aim to improve preparedness

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As survivors of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami cope with the loss of their families, homes and livelihoods, some of the younger generation are focusing their energies on helping people elsewhere in Asia.

Haruka Kurosawa, 19, lived through the 2011 calamity and afterward witnessed the dismal reality of life in evacuation shelters.

On March 15, he will join a group of Japanese peers and survivors from the typhoon-struck Philippines to discuss their experiences and ideas for better disaster preparedness in a forum to be held on the sidelines of the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai.

"This is a big opportunity for Japanese and Filipino students to come together (on) a global platform and make proposals on what we can do for disaster prevention" in Asia, said Kurosawa, a Fukushima native.

His prefecture was hit hard and is still trying to cope with the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

The U.N. conference and other events will be held from March 14 to 18 in Sendai. The delegates are expected to discuss a new framework to replace the 10-year Hyogo Framework for Action, adopted in 2005.

Kurosawa will join three fellow Japanese students and three young Filipino typhoon survivors at the symposium, organized by the Tokyo-based Beyond Tomorrow Global Fund for Education Assistance.

Super typhoon Haiyan devastated the Philippine island of Leyte in November 2013.

"Coming from Japan, I want to relay to the world the importance of disaster preven-



Haruka Kurosawa helps paint a house being prepared for typhoon-hit people on Leyte Island in the Philippines last August. COURTESY OF BEYOND TOMORROW/KYODO

tion," said Kurosawa, who via Beyond Tomorrow visited the Philippines last summer to learn about disaster risks in other Asian countries.

Recounting his trip to Tacloban, the devastated capital of Leyte, Kurosawa said he was struck by the gaps in preparedness among the communities. Though not far apart, the way each prepared made a difference in the death toll.

"In one community where there were fatalities, houses were built a few meters from the sea despite rules prohibiting that, and students were not

taught about disaster management. In another community with hardly any casualties, the locals were ready for disasters," he said.

Japan, by contrast, was generally prepared to respond via such measures as school evacuation drills.

Masahiro Kikuchi, 21, lost both parents in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture. He visited the Philippines on the same program and said it was moving to see the devastation wreaked on Tacloban by Haiyan.

With the students suffering "a similar plight to that in To-

hoku, we have something in common, and that is strong desire to protect people from disasters," he said.

Kikuchi, a University of Tsukuba student of social and international studies, said he has overcome the anxiety he felt after 3/11 and is now ready to think about the future.

"It would be nice if I can share what I have gone through and motivate people of my age to think about disaster prevention efforts," said Kikuchi, who aims to become a reporter and eventually enter politics to expedite reconstruction efforts in

Tohoku.

The career choices of Kikuchi and Kurosawa largely have to do with their post-2011 experiences and desire to help disaster-stricken communities in Japan and elsewhere.

Kurosawa seeks to work with the United Nations, with a focus on alleviating poverty by building efficient food distribution systems.

On 3/11, Kurosawa and his family were spared but witnessed their hometown's struggles.

The Dokkyo University foreign languages major helped

the elderly, played with children and distributed blankets and food at his high school gym when it became an evacuation shelter.

"It was hard to distribute food due to the confusion," Kurosawa recalls. "There was no manual about it, and the local government was not fully functional. Student volunteers would go to the city halls to get supplies for evacuees, but that alone was not enough to feed everyone."

"My experience made me think about other Asian countries or poor areas facing a similar plight, and what I could do."