

Disaster Turns Into Blessings

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“Disaster turns into blessings,” Professor Shinichi Egawa, MD, PhD, FACS, explained to the audience at the International Workshop on Implementation of Practical Disaster Risk Reduction, which was held 7–10 November 2014 at the International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS) on the campus of Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan. Professor Egawa noted that the logo for IRIDeS is derived from an interpretation of the ancient Chinese character for disaster and an iris, the violet flower of nobility and desire. The IRIDeS focuses on resilience, recovery, and a prosperous future following a disaster.

That enlightening description accurately represents the ground where these words were spoken. Three years ago on 11 March 2011, The Great East Japan Earthquake devastated this area. On a nearby hilltop in the Miyagi prefecture, a well-known local temple survived the ravages of the tsunami. A new area for prayer and reflection has been added atop this temple because it overlooks the widespread destruction of the tsunami. The thousands of lives lost and the families devastated can be seen in the seemingly endless outlines of destroyed home sites, businesses, and roadways visible for many kilometers. Posted nearby is a photograph that compares a 2001 overview of the area with a 27 March 2011 image showing the impacted area 2 weeks after the tsunami. Driving in the local area, one can see the remaining scars, such as the uninhabitable, severely damaged school and nearby buildings down a path lined by twisted metal fencing. The Sendai International Airport, which was closed for over 1 year after the tsunami, now posts a sign that marks the water level on that fateful day. The force of what occurred here is still palpable, but more meaningful is the message from those most impacted, a lesson in hope, community, and resiliency.

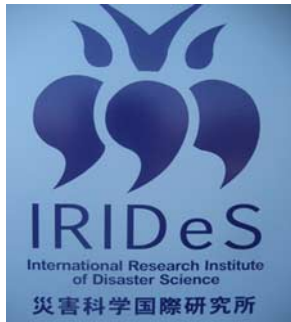
Walking through a community waterside market held every Sunday, this message is vividly seen in the local families and friends who gather. The smiles shared and the community spirit demonstrate that the healing process is succeeding. A handwritten sign posted at this market shows their appreciation to the world and their faith in a prosperous future. The people of the great nation of Japan who were most impacted clearly embody the message “Disaster turns into blessings”! We are so very grateful to Professor Egawa and his colleagues at IRIDeS of Tohoku University for the opportunity to share with the world these lessons in communicating hope to all disaster-impacted communities. The dedication ceremony of the new IRIDeS building complex is a landmark event for Japan and for the nations and lives that will benefit from their multidisciplinary scientific research and international collaborations.

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Cover Images:



Upper left: Sendai airport entrance.



Upper right: International Research Institute of Disaster Science logo.



Lower left: "Peace" friends at the local market.



Lower right: Thank you message.