

Japan's churches urged to work together after "triple disaster"

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Seoul, South Korea, May 9 (ENInews)--Japan's churches and Christian councils should establish a consortium to respond to the devastating 11 March earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power plant accident, an ecumenical meeting said.

In addition, the National Christian Council in Japan should "convene a forum of all the Japanese partners to facilitate the exchange of information and activities and explore avenues of cooperation," according to a statement released at the end of the Japan Earthquake/Tsunami Relief Ecumenical Solidarity Meeting held here from 6-7 May.

About 40 representatives of Christian partner organizations and churches from the West and Asia attended the meeting, which was coordinated by the North East Asia Churches Forum of the Christian Conference of Asia. About 14,700 people were killed by the 11 March disaster, with about 10,700 listed as missing. The disaster also crippled the Daiichi Fukushima nuclear power plant.

"I had never expected that such people would come together for Japan," the Rev. Hiroko Ueda, acting office general secretary of the National Christian Council in Japan, told ENInews. "I was glad that they cared for such a developed country as Japan." She added, "I feel that God is telling us to rethink the ecumenical movement clearly through the disaster."

The recommendations came as the council is restructuring, reducing the number of officials and clarifying decision-making functions. "I cannot conceal my anxiety with bearing such a great responsibility while the council is restructuring," Ueda said. "We are undertaking work that would require an organizational structure more than twice as large as our current structure."

The participants also recommended that all churches and ecumenical institutions strengthen the capacity of the council, build up church and ecumenical response programs and invite the involvement of ACT Alliance, a Geneva-based grouping of 111 churches and church-related organizations for humanitarian assistance and development.

The attendees further recommended that they provide technical assistance both at local and national levels, continue psychological trauma counseling and recovery program, ensure advocacy for adequate social services and reliance on alternative source of energy.

The participants in the meeting included ACT Alliance, Church World Service and the United Methodist Committee on Relief. Others present were representatives from Asia, Europe, Japan, Korea, United States, World Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia, as well as Sendai Christian Alliance Disaster Relief Network, a network of Catholic and Protestant churches supporting the victims near the epicenter of the disaster in the city of Sendai.

The meeting's participants also adopted a statement in response to the accident at the Daiichi plant, calling on governments "to stop the building of nuclear power generating plants" and seek alternative sources of energy.

On 11 April, the Japanese Christian council had written to Prime Minister Naoto Kan to object to the government's nuclear power policy and demand that all domestic nuclear power plants and related facilities be totally abolished. During the Seoul meeting on 6 May, Kan told journalists that his government had requested that Chubu Electric Power, which runs the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant in Omaezaki in central Japan, stop all its reactors until mid- and long-term safety measures are completed.