



International Symposium From HIRONO's point of view

~ Towards "Happy Return" from evacuation ~

From "Early Return" to "Happy Return"

Report (Outline)



International Symposium

From HIRONO's point of view

~ Towards "Happy Return" from evacuation ~

From "Early Return" to "Happy Return"

On June 15th 2014, the town of HIRONO and the Tokyo University Graduate School of Frontier Sciences jointly organized the International Symposium [From HIRONO's point of view] at the HIRONO Town Community Center. Over 130 people attended the event, which hosted a panel discussion centered along the theme of a "Happy Return." The participants were foreign researchers well versed in the plight of disaster victims evacuated from their hometowns due to tsunamis and hurricanes, as well as 3 middle schoolers and women from HIRONO Town.

To conclude the symposium, all the participants delivered to the audience a final "Message from HIRONO."

June 15th 2014

A message from "HIRONO"

On March 11th 2011, we were forced to evacuate in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the following Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster. However, we gathered here today in HIRONO with domestic and foreign experts to determine the necessary steps to achieve a favorable return to our town.

Furthermore, we reached the following common understandings.

1. After the hearings yesterday (6/14) with evacuees living in the Takaku and Joubanmukae temporary housing complexes, we would like to stress the importance of the following point.
- There must be a frank and unreserved exchange of opinions between families, residents, and the town government.
2. Through today's panel discussion, we also established the following points.
1) A space where all stakeholders can exchange their opinions with each other must be created.
2) We must devote time to the promotion of businesses that actively involve our residents.
3. On this occasion, we also took note of the conditions of refugees and displaced persons in the world, and once again, we gathered the following points.
Although each example consists of differing issues, we realized that at their root are many common factors, such as the importance of inter-generational communication.
Because of this, we are aware that holding future symposiums in HIRONO such as this one will help tackle issues and make contributions, not only for FUKUSHIMA (the nuclear disaster area in Fukushima Prefecture), but for displaced peoples around the world as well.
4. In order to design a "favorable return", we once again established that considering the viewpoint of the child-raising generations is of the utmost importance. Therefore, to fulfill this aim, the active participation of "child-raising women" is vital, and we recognize the significance of creating the necessary environment to make this possible. From here on out, we will galvanize our efforts to accomplish our goals.
5. Using this symposium as an opportunity to exchange domestic and foreign wisdom in HIRONO, and aiming for community development in tune with cultural considerations, we will devote all our efforts to gather understanding from the world, and commit to the revitalization of not only HIRONO, but all of FUKUSHIMA.

Based on the conclusions we have attained from today's symposium, each of us will do what we can, to the best of our ability, in order to fulfill our goals.

Again, studying various examples from around the world in this international symposium has been extremely valuable. Consequently, we who have convened in HIRONO will make use of today's symposium, improve our efforts, and will continue to do the best we can.

I . Keynote Address

It is of great importance that the residents who desire to return to HIRONO as soon as possible be able to do so.

Tokyo University Graduate School of Frontier Sciences Professor, Mr.Mikiyasu Nakayama



1% of the current world population can be classified as an “Evacuee” or an “Internally Displaced Person” (IDP). Approximately 25 million people worldwide are considered as IDP, and around 1% of this population is due to the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster. Both evacuees and IDPs receive aid under the assumption that they intend to return to their original location. However, there are a considerable amount of victims who do not wish to return. What causes this unwillingness to return? What is necessary for the realization of their happy return? In order to answer these questions and more, we have established an international joint research project dealing with “evacuees unwilling to return home.”

We understand that an early return is not necessarily a happy one. We are aware that while some residents wish desire to return as quickly as possible to HIRONO Town, it is also important to realize the happy return each and every resident wishes. We must also ask ourselves how we can erase the worries of the child-raising generation of women who hesitate to return. By facilitating communication and exchanges of opinion between the experts and the townspeople, we would like to expose the factors necessary for a happy return, and present them to society.

II . Panel Discussion

● Coordinator

Hosei University, Faculty of Humanity and Environment, Professor, Mr. Ryo Fujikura

● Foreign Researchers

USA: Environmental Law Institute, International Programs Co-Director, Mr. Carl Bruch

Indonesia: Andalas University, Center for Economic Research Director, Mr. Syafruddin Karim

Indonesia: Syiah Kuala University, Faculty of Economics Professor, Mr. Said Muhammad

Sri Lanka: Moratuwa University, Faculty of Engineering Senior Lecturer, Mr. Jagath Manatunge

● HIRONO Residents

HIRONO Junior High School 3rd year students: Mr. Kinshiro Watanabe, Ms. Hina Nemoto, Ms. Ruka Owada

Child Raising Generation: Ms. Rie Abe, Ms. Naoko Moue

Senior Generation: Ms. Akiko Igari

HIRONO Junior High School 3rd year student presentations

Reconstruction is a business. We would like to live in our town the way we did before with peace of mind.



Mr. Kinshirou
Watanabe

Mr. Watanabe

I personally don't think the effects of radioactivity or the unease concerning public safety are the reasons for people not returning. I think the main reason behind this is convenience. I've heard that a high school will open here in HIRONO next year, but I believe that next year is too premature. No one will come if supermarkets or clinics are not built first. High school life would be very lonely without anyone around. I really think that reconstruction is a business.

Ms. Nemoto

I am very thankful for the many workers who have come from all over the country for the sake of Futaba District. However, we are somewhat fearful and resistant to accept people that we don't know, coming from many different regions. I want to exercise outside by myself, but my parents won't really let me. Nothing of the sort happened in HIRONO before. I think we should have more patrols outside everyday, and it is important that we brighten the town as a whole.



Ms. Hina Nemoto



Ms. Ruka Owada

Ms. Owada

Right now, in HIRONO, we have problems with public safety, and decontamination. This means we cannot do simple things like play alone, go to school with our friends, or even play around together outside. I would like to have a place where all the children can play and have lots of fun. If other schools could use it, I think the HIRONO middle school and the one-track middle and high school could work well together.

In order to create the one-track middle and high school, we middle schoolers are moving to the elementary school building starting from the second semester. For us 3rd years, our elementary school graduation and middle school entrance ceremonies weren't held in our school building, so I hope that at least our middle school graduation ceremony could be held in the gymnasium, even if we have to have the high school lend it to us. I would be very happy if we could have a fine graduation ceremony.

Child Raising Generation

Life as an evacuee was an important experience. The residents in the parenting generation need a place where there can be a frank exchange of opinions.

Ms. Abe

Born and raised here, I am currently raising my two children in this town that I love. Looking back at my life after the disaster, I can see that the experiences I have had, the people I have met, and the times of ease and hardship are all part of my life story. I have accepted them as part of life, and it is because of all that has happened that I can say I have found happiness.

In August of 2012, my family used the reopening of the schools as an opportunity to return to HIRONO Town. Almost two years have passed, and we are all enjoying our lives here. When we had just returned, I had a habit of saying "Don't worry, we will manage." I can't say that the living or educational environments were great at the time. Without saying things were sufficient or insufficient, we lived here, despite having some problems, and some requests.

We parents have a special power that enables us to do things for the children. For this, I believe we should have a space where we can all have a friendly but frank exchange of ideas with the town government, starting with the mayor. I think that being able to go for advice or counsel at any time would help give us the peace of mind to do anything for our children.

Now, 3 years after the disaster, I believe that timing is extremely important for the parenting generation in relation to their return to the town. Either for school or for work, each family has their own circumstances. For example, even if the living environment has become satisfactory, a family cannot simply move back instantly. Right now, having returned to the town and living a normal life in my own house with my whole family feels like happiness to me. When the time comes, even if you feel somewhat lost, please remember these words: "Don't worry, we will manage". And then, when you come back to HIRONO, and your family pulls together with smiles on their faces, I believe that is what you could call a "happy return". I don't think anyone else can prepare a satisfactory return. In my eyes, we have to decide by ourselves how we want to live our lives, and how we feel about our situation. I hope that from now on, more families will be able to feel happiness in this town.



Ms. Rie Abe



Ms. Naoko Moue

Ms. Moue

I currently have four children: two in elementary school, in the second and fourth years, one in kindergarten, and a two year old. All five of us live together with my husband. After the disaster, we evacuated to Kanagawa for three years, until we returned to HIRONO in April of this year. After returning, we realized that while there were lots of traffic here, there were only very few people walking through the town, which frankly gave us a very lonely feeling. In Kanagawa, our children participated in boy scout activities, tennis, walking, gymnastics, and bike riding. My husband and I spent countless days talking about our children's future, would we decide

to return to HIRONO. The children would have so many more possibilities for their future in Kanagawa. They also didn't want to be separated from their friends or their school that they had come to know so well. We were also worried about practicality and convenience. However, after they transferred to HIRONO middle school in April, none of my children have told me that they didn't want to go to school. Not even once. They

told me they made friends, and they have fun. Only us parents were worried, and I was surprised at our children's adaptability. In Kanagawa, we lived in company housing, so we always had to scold them for being loud, but in our house in HIRONO, they can be carefree. They play tennis with the HIRONO Mikan Club, they ride their bikes in the park, they play tag, and we have barbecues in our garden. There are many things we can do now, because we live here in HIRONO. And then, seeing our children's smiling faces, I realized that this is fine for them, and I was the one clinging to a convenient life. Being evacuated for 3 years, our family has had many problems, and has gone through many tough times, but we have had a great experience. A wonderful experience, meeting and parting with many people. I do believe that even my children will never forget these precious last three years of their lives.

I would like to end by saying that all the children in HIRONO right now are very energetic, and can play like children should. For these children to smile even more, I believe the generation who raises them must have a place where we can talk frankly, a place where the mayor and everyone can listen to us, and engage in an honest discussion.

Senior Generation Presentation

I would like the townspeople to come together and create whatever is lacking in HIRONO Town.



Ms. Akiko Igari

Ms. Igari

My family and I have returned to our hometown at the same time as the municipal office returned to HIRONO from Yumoto. I have three grandchildren, and the youngest one was three years old. At the time, decontamination had not even started, so we were worried about effects of radiation. We asked workers to remove all vegetation from our garden, and we replaced its top soil. After that, we borrowed a radiation dosimeter from the town office time and time again, and decontaminated all the places with high values using a high pressure cleaner. We lowered the values until we believe we could live there safely. There are no special or famous products from HIRONO Town.

However, the climate and temperatures are mild and our mandarins are sweet, sour, and delicious. We have rice paddies, fields, mountains, and the sea. As the seasons change, so do the sights, and after living here for around two years, we have not really felt any inconveniences.

I have a chronic disease, so I've had the experience of being sick for countless years. Because of this, I have been paying special attention to my health. Lately, I've been playing park golf and ground golf and I practice when I have some free time. I went to HIRONO elementary and middle schools, and I play park golf with my old classmates once a week. Some people come from other towns or even Iwaki city, and over a hundred people have joined for a tournament. In any case, even if we live in HIRONO, we can enjoy life to the fullest. I cannot say enough how happy and warm I feel when I talk to my grandchildren here. For shopping, we use the small supermarket, the convenience stores, and the farmer's market. If we need more, we drive to Iwaki city to buy the rest. Some of my friends have returned quickly to HIRONO, and started growing flowers or seasonal vegetables. Sometimes I head over to their homes and they will treat me. In order to develop this town further, I believe we have a strong need for employment opportunities, a library, a park that adults and children alike can enjoy, as well as more shops.

I believe it is important that we realize this one step at a time, by having all the townspeople come together and share their opinions instead of relying solely on the municipal government.

Discussion

Mr.Bruch

Participatory planning is very important. The residents must be included in the discussion without trying to rush the proceedings.

Mr.Manatunge

We must be careful when considering the needs of the youth and elderly. The elderly are the ones who have built HIRONO, but the youth are the ones who should take care of the senior citizens, while raising their own children. I believe we must achieve these two points.



Mr.Karimi, Mr.Muhammad

In order to encourage a satisfactory return to HIRONO, the town must be revitalized to make it even more attractive than previously.

Mr.Fujikura

This is a question from the audience to the three adult women in the panel. What was the occasion that made you feel happiness during difficult times?

Ms.Abe

Instead of thinking that I found happiness despite the earthquake, I think that it is because of the earthquake that we met so many people, and we were very thankful for their support. Because of this, I can say without hesitating that right now, I live a happy life. I positively think that by living normally in HIRONO without that event, we would not have had the same experience.

Ms.Moue

I really do not think that I felt unhappy because of the earthquake. Being born and raised in HIRONO, I never really had any complaints. That year, after leaving HIRONO for the city for the first time in my life, I finally realized the inconveniences here. However, living here together with my family is truly happiness. It's not something physical, but more something spiritual. Right now, I can proudly say that I am happy.

Ms.Igari

I live happily right now. My family is healthy, my children and grandchildren live near me, and we help each other out. While being evacuated was tough, it wasn't a completely horrible experience. I have never really felt unhappy. I believe happiness really depends on each person's way of thinking.

Mr.Fujikura

After hearing the discussion today, the words that made a great impression on me were "We would like a place for frank discussion." This must be what the evacuees and current residents truly think at the moment. I believe it would be necessary to have not just a place to speak to the municipal government, but a place where residents and nonresidents can exchange their opinions. Of course, infrastructure and economic policies are important as well. However, we cannot be hasty. From today's discussion, I am convinced that we must listen to everyone's opinion before elaborating our plans.



Thank you very much for today.



HIRONO TOWN IMAGE CHARACTER
[Hirobo]

Edited and Published by
HIRONO TOWN Reconstruction Planning Division

[HP] <http://www.town.hirono.fukushima.jp/>



福が満開、福のしま。