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Ten years after the Great East Japan Earthquake  
(Statement by Minister for Foreign Affairs MOTEGI Toshimitsu)

Ten years ago on March 11, the disaster of an unprecedented scale wrought havoc in Japan. The Great East Japan Earthquake claimed over 20,000 lives due to the earthquake and tsunami, and we are still dealing with the aftermath of TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident. As we mark a decade since the disaster, I once again pray for the repose of the souls of the victims and extend my sincerest condolences to their families.

Since the immediate aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Japan received countless support and messages of encouragement from countries all over the world. In addition to donations from many countries and regions, people from across the globe came to the affected areas to help search for missing people and support those who were in need. I would like to reiterate my heartfelt appreciation to everyone in all the countries and regions.

A decade later, some remain unable to return to their homes, and there still remain challenges toward full reconstruction. Nonetheless, thanks to the support for the reconstruction, the affected areas in Japan have made steady headway, and our ties with the world are now stronger than ever. Exports of agricultural, forestry, and fishery products from Fukushima Prefecture recovered to pre-disaster levels in 2017 and have continued to hit record highs for three consecutive years since then. On the other hand, it is extremely regrettable that some countries and regions continue to impose restrictions on imports of Japanese food products, even a decade after the disaster. The Government of Japan will make its utmost efforts, based on scientific evidence, to have the restrictions lifted as early as possible and advance further efforts to increase Japanese exports of agricultural, forestry, and fishery products. The local employment has been improving, and economic growth through innovation is becoming a reality. The Fukushima Hydrogen Energy Research Field (FH2R), a research and development hub for hydrogen and renewable energies, serves as a driver of international intellectual exchanges and business as well as a source of innovation. In addition, exchanges among young people between the affected areas and the world are continuing.

The lessons we learned from the disaster are not only about the importance of Japan's reconstruction. Japan has been putting emphasis on international cooperation for disaster risk reduction (DRR) even before the Great East Japan Earthquake, and further strengthened its assistance in this field over the last ten years. In 2015, Japan hosted the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai where it advanced the concept of "build back better" as a commitment shared by the international community. Japan contributed to incorporating the vision of DRR into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Japan also took the initiative for the adoption of the UN General Assembly resolution on the World Tsunami Awareness Day, thus endeavoring to promote DRR education internationally.

The Japanese people will never forget the generosity shown and the support kindly provided by the people of the world in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake. In recent years, natural disasters have become more intense, with extreme weather events becoming more frequent due to climate change. International cooperation through DRR is becoming ever more critical in this context. Japan remains committed to working strenuously for the peace and security of people all over the world.

With a deep sense of gratitude, Japan is determined to hold the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in a safe and secure manner this summer as a symbol of global unity in overcoming COVID-19, and show to the world our reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake.