Visit of the Korean Red Cross Delegation to Japan

The Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS) welcomed a delegation from the Republic of Korea National Red Cross (KNRC) that visited Japan from June 2 to June 5, 2017 for a tour of the nuclear disaster preparedness and response system in place at the JRCS to be prepared for possible nuclear disaster in Korea. The delegates visited the JRCS headquarters (HQ), Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures, and the Japanese Red Cross Ishinomaki Hospital, where they participated in a session of the JRCS Nuclear Disaster Response Basic Training. Although it was a short visit, the delegation members exchanged diverse discussions and presentations with the JRCS staff, touring several places affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami (GEJET). For the JRCS’ part, it was a great honor to host the KNRC delegation to introduce what the JRCS has worked out from the lessons drawn from the GEJET and the subsequent Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident (“Fukushima Daiichi accident”) to prepare for possible nuclear disaster in the future. The JRCS is hoping to continue similar cooperation to enhance nuclear disaster preparedness of sister National Societies and the Movement.

The KNRC’s visit to Japan has been recapped below, based largely on what was reported by the KNRC after the trip, along with the slide decks presented at the meetings as well as the photographs from the tour.

Visit to JRCS Enhance KNRC’s Understanding of the Extremity of GEJET
- Prompting thoughts about their role to fight possible nuclear disaster

From June 2 to June 5, 2017, the KNRC delegation visited the HQ of the JRCS, their Fukushima Chapter, and several sites in Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures; a region now known as one of the most severely affected areas struck by the Great East Japan Earthquake—a magnitude 9.0 megathrust earthquake on March 11, 2011 that caused heavy casualties and destruction of the major infrastructure and agricultural properties.

Constituting the implementation of the Agenda 3 calling for reinforcing the regional cooperation framework for disaster management adopted at the 2015 East Asia National Red Cross Societies Leaders Meeting, the delegation’s tour was also intended to facilitate collaboration between the two organizations representing their respective countries. It was also an opportunity for the delegates to learn the tangible aspects of the practical and systematic relief activities established by the JRCS and the role of their Nuclear Disaster Resource Center to optimize the learning for reinforcement and building up of the practical response capacities of the staff and the disaster relief agents of the KNRC.

Having experienced a massive earthquake—the greatest in the last quarter century—in Gyeongju in the southern province of Korean Peninsula, this case occurred in Japan of a nuclear disaster resulting from an earthquake is a quite common topic among the South Koreans today as something they can relate to, i.e., a nuclear accident caused by a massive earthquake.

The delegation was led by Mr. Yong-Sang Kim, Managing Director of the Disaster and Safety Department of the KNRC, with nine participants from the KNRC HQ and the local chapters located near nuclear power plants.
Day 1 (June 2): JRCS HQ

The delegation paid a visit to the JRCS HQ office on the first day. Mr. Masahito Yamazawa, Director General of the Red Cross Nuclear Disaster Resource Center, gave a presentation on the role and the legal framework of the JRCS relief activities.

What impressed the KNRC the most about the JRCS relief system was the fact that the focal point of the JRCS’s disaster response operations is the human resources belonging to 92 Red Cross hospitals including 13 radiation emergency hospitals throughout the country; as opposed to the system in place in South Korea, where the response operations for nuclear and radiation disasters are controlled by the National Radiation Emergency Treatment Center, which designates specific hospitals for distinct response services required.

Mr. Yamazawa also illustrated their medical relief response system exemplifying the Kumamoto earthquake, which struck the Kumamoto region on April 16, 2016 provoking mobilization of 1,600 first responders from 207 JRCS medical relief teams. Mr. Yamazawa stated that, through the operation in Kumamoto, the JRCS recognized the need to enhance the activities of their volunteer corps in disaster response.

In the Q&A session following the presentation, the KNRC asked how the JRCS and the Japanese government coordinate the supply of relief goods, and how responsibilities and functional roles are defined between the two organizations when a disaster or calamity has occurred.

Subsequently, Mr. Mitsuhiro Fujimaki, Program Officer of the Nuclear Disaster Resource Center of the JRCS, made a presentation at the second session of the day to explain the nuclear disaster preparedness/response mechanism established at the JRCS. He pointed out that, it was not until the relief operation for the GEJET was completed that the JRCS could fully focus on the capacity building work to increase their nuclear disaster preparedness and response. Hence, during the aftermath of the GEJET, the JRCS could not dispatch their relief teams in an effective way due to the challenges unique to nuclear disasters.

The challenges highlighted by Mr. Fujimaki as those that stood in the way of the JRCS first responders in the relief operation were: limited availability of radiation protective equipment, and absence of guidelines concerning relief responses during a nuclear disaster. Consequently, the JRCS later took corrective measures, which included arrangements for stocking the radiation protective equipment/suits and providing basic training to the staff members of relief teams, etc.

The last presentation for the day was given by Dr. Koichi Hayashida, Deputy Director for Management and Policy Planning, Nuclear Disaster Management Bureau, Cabinet Office, responsible for the Japanese government’s overall structure and process of the disaster management system.

He explained the changes made to the government’s policy on disaster response following the GEJET. Having reviewed their nuclear disaster response plan—which did not work effectively at the time of the GEJET—the Japanese government laid down the Nuclear Emergency Response Guidelines in 2012.

The slide decks resented in the meeting can be downloaded from the links below.

The Disaster Relief Activities of the Japanese Red Cross Society: By Mr. M. Yamazawa

Japanese Red Cross Society Initiatives for Nuclear Disaster Response: By Mr. M. Fujimaki
**Day 2 (June 3): Fukushima Prefecture**

The highlights on Day 2 were the site visits in Fukushima prefecture and a presentation session prepared by both the JRCS Fukushima Chapter and the KNRC Busan Chapter.

**Site Tour at Commutan Fukushima**

The place chosen for the first site visit of the delegation was “Commutan Fukushima” located at the Fukushima Prefectural Centre for Environmental Creation. Established to preserve and exhibit information related to the Fukushima Daiichi accident, the venue features five sections with respective themes, exhibiting diverse information including the recovery progress made in the affected area since the occurrence of the GEJET on March 11, 2011, environmental recovery efforts, basic knowledge about radiation, alternative energy sources, life not depending on nuclear power, etc. All the exhibits helped the delegates understand how the communities have been trying to survive and restore their normal lives since the traumatic experience.

**Meeting with the Fukushima Chapter**

Following the site tour, the personnel from the JRCS Fukushima Chapter gave presentations to share the experience of the relief teams in the first response operation for the GEJET.

Mr. Shoichi Kishinami, Director of General Affairs Division of the Fukushima Chapter, explained the struggles fought and attempts made by the relief teams to secure the safety of the first responders. When the rescue teams were deployed, they had neither radiation protection suits required for operation in the radioactive environment, nor radiation measurement devices; hence they had no choice but to have the first responders withdrawn from the affected area to avoid possible radiation exposure.
A different array of activities provided by the Fukushima Chapter to the evacuees were introduced next by Mr. Koji Takano, Director General of the JRCS Fukushima Chapter. These activities include health promotion sessions, life recovery programs, educational support for displaced school children, and reunion events for evacuated communities.

The session continued with a presentation by the KNRC Busan Chapter introducing a joint disaster preparedness drill, which is held once a year organized by the Busan Metropolitan City government in collaboration with the related organizations.

The slide decks resented in the meeting can be downloaded from the links below.

Nuclear Disaster Response in the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami: By Mr. Kishinami
Recovery Assistance Programs of Japanese Red Cross Fukushima Chapter: By Mr. Koji Takano
Radiological & Nuclear Response in Busan: By Mr. Jung Hwa Yong

Field Trip in Fukushima

After the meeting, the delegation traveled to a heavily affected area close to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Guided by the JRCS Fukushima Chapter, the group toured the area where entering/staying is still restricted for the sake of the residents’ safety. The scene of houses lying deserved and cars sitting abandoned told the gravity of the damage.

In some cities, only less than 10 percent of the total population has returned to their homes albeit the lifting of the evacuation order. On the drive, the group passed an area where decontamination work was ongoing; the clean-up efforts need to be continued until the radiation level meets the safety criteria. Q&A sessions were held during the field trip, in which the subjects of major interest were the compensation arrangement and disposal of the contaminated soil.
Day 3 (June 4): Ishinomaki and Onagawa

On Day 3, the delegates participated in a part of the JRCS Nuclear Disaster Response Basic Training, which was held for the members of medical relief teams at the JRC Ishinomaki Hospital. Afterward, the delegation paid a visit to the Onagawa Community Medical Center.

The JRCS Nuclear Disaster Response Basic Training Session

The session joined by the delegation focused on the ways to use a personal dosimeter, to put on/remove a radiation protection suit, and to maintain survey meters and personal digital dosimeters.

During the session, how to put on/remove a protection suit was shown to the trainees in a demonstration. The session gave the delegates an opportunity to try on a radiation protection suit and use a radiation measurement device by themselves, helping them to have a better understanding of how to use such equipment.

The delegation also joined a case study with the trainees, where participants were divided into groups of 6 to 8 individuals with 2 to 3 radiation emergency medical care advisors assigned to lead the simulation-based case study.

At the end of the course, the Certificate of Participation was given to each delegation member to commemorate the occasion.
Onagawa Community Medical Center

Following the training session, the delegation headed for the Onagawa Community Medical Center to visit the Disaster Museum located inside the facility. The museum displays photos and media coverage featuring the images of Onagawa town being swept away by the tsunami on March 11, 2011.

A trace of accumulation left on a pillar of the building shows the height of the tsunami waves was high enough to flood the inside of the medical center building. Tragically this means, as the building sits upon a hill looking down the town, that the tsunami swallowed the lives and properties once throbbing in Onagawa. Down below the medical center building, as well as on the roadside, visitors find an altar and memorial stones placed in tribute to the victims.

The Onagawa Nuclear Power Station

The delegation moved to the Onagawa Nuclear Power Generation PR Center adjacent to the Onagawa Nuclear Power Station (Onagawa NPP) operated by Tohoku-Electric Power Company.

It came as a surprise that the Onagawa NPP stands closer to the epicenter of the March 11th earthquake than the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Located at a higher altitude, the Onagawa NPP escaped the catastrophe suffered by the Fukushima Daiichi. This is attributable to, as has been said, that careful consideration was given to the risk of earthquake and tsunami; building the power plant at high altitude, protecting it with a seawall higher than the level generally regarded as sufficient.

As explained by a guide-lecturer at the PR Center, they were working on further strengthening their emergency capabilities with an enhanced power system to protect the reactors from breakage should the external power supply be completely lost.
Day 4 (June 5): Tokyo

On Day 4, the delegation visited the Ikebukuro Life Safety Learning Center in Tokyo run by the Tokyo Fire Department. As a place for interactive learning, it provides an experience to learn disaster prevention and life-saving, featuring various emergency situations including earthquake, fire, and smoke.

During the tour, the delegates experienced five distinct types of earthquake shaking and learned how to respond depending on the type of the earthquake. They also had hands-on experience of fire extinguishing and evacuation from thick smoke. Additionally, to practice how to carry out rescue work for an injured person and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation method was a useful experience.

Looking Back on the Study Tour in Japan

The study tour gave an opportunity for the delegation to follow a trail of the destruction caused by the world’s fourth most devastating earthquake, as well as to learn the practice and operational system implemented by each stakeholder to enhance disaster preparedness and response.

The experienced has reinforced the delegates’ belief that this type of study tour would eventually contribute to building a platform for sharing experiences and knowledge among different Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners, ultimately producing a further enhanced and coherent comprehensive response system to face global disasters.

Having returned from the tour, the delegation shared their personal thoughts and ideas gained from the trip; some of which have been summarized as follows.

Japan has become stronger with sacrifices, whereas Korea can become strong without them

- “It was a wonderful opportunity for me to learn the disaster response plan and the equipment in place at the JRCS in a comprehensive way."
- “The presentation by the Japanese government official and the one by the JRCS helped us learn the organized system for disaster response linking the Red Cross and the government. We could also understand how the JRCS has built up a solid reputation."
- “The nuclear disaster response system of the JRCS is established on the basis of the resources provided by 92 Japanese Red Cross hospitals, which is quite different from the situation with the KNRC. So, we need to come up with a different approach to establish our own response system to deal with radiation disasters.”

Recovery operation is continuing for considerable time and effort while anxieties lingering

- “Previously my perception of the nuclear disaster in Japan was based on indirect information, such as provided by internet, radio news, SNS, etc. However, this visit gave me a chance to get the facts from a more objective viewpoint. I could also have time to communicate directly with the people in charge of the field work at the JRCS.”
- “Before making this trip, I had had strong resistance and felt uncomfortable to visit Fukushima out of fear of radiation. However, during the tour, I found radiation measurement equipment installed wherever we went, which made me feel safe and secured.”
- “Despite the considerable time and effort devoted to the recovery process, the decontamination work appeared to be continuing without its completion in sight, and the radioactive waste being produced by the cleanup seemed to raise problems for the future.”
- “While travelling through the contaminated area, we were allowed to observe the decontamination work
only through the car windows. Therefore, there was some restrictions on gathering more information. However, given the rules and measures for safety of visitors, it was fairly understandable."

**JRCS’s various efforts so far for disaster recovery are bringing strong encouragement and empowerment to those affected**

- “I believe that the various activities undertaken by the JRCS, including the post-disaster recovery projects, have brought great comfort to the people in Japan.”
- “This trip helped me come up with an idea of an activity that we can adopt as a special project for the Hope Sharing Volunteer Center within the KNRC.”
- “As the current relief activities in Korea heavily focus on distribution of relief goods, we need to change the perception held by the support groups and local governments.”
- “I am grateful to the JRCS for accepting our visit, which can contribute to generating sound solidarity between the two organizations to fight disasters and address many issues. For my own part, the experience can also help upgrade and extend my capacities.”