

## Lessons from the Great Hanshin Earthquake: Building Many Bridges Across Borders for Disaster Preparedness and Response

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Prevention and preparedness are crucial in mitigating the impact of disasters. How should disasters be managed in this new era?

The Great Hanshin Earthquake devastated my hometown Kobe in 1995. Preventable deaths occurred because of failure to meet the medical needs of such an emergency. The imbalance between medical supply and demand could not be quickly corrected because components for disaster management were lacking: communication among hospitals, utilization of air transportation, etc. In short, the cause was unpreparedness.

In the 23 years following this earthquake, Japan has experienced various major disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunami, floods, volcanic eruptions, and terror attacks. This was the same for many nations in the Asia-Pacific region as well. Yet we still have not eliminated preventable death in disasters.

Has there been no progress since these disasters? Have we not made any efforts to improve our response to disasters? Japanese disaster management system has seen four clear improvements: disaster base hospitals, disaster medical assistance teams (DMATs), emergency medical information system (EMIS), and disaster medical coordinators. These four components are not yet perfected, but have functioned better "disaster by disaster". One key to these improvements is "standardization". For example, all DMAT members learn under a standardized curriculum, EMIS is the common tool for communication nationwide in disasters, and JSPEED is the standard format to assess medical aid stations in shelters. What improvements has your nation seen in the past couple of decades?

Various components are needed in building a long bridge. If more component standardization is achieved, it would make assembling bridges much easier, no matter the shape or form. I would encourage all of you to share the components you have created, to build bridges over streams, rivers, channels, and oceans and across borders-for better disaster preparedness and response around the globe.