

The 3.11 Bond

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Repeated bombing of the local villages; People losing their beloved family and friends; Brutal killings of women and children. These are some of the things we learn about war in high school. We read through our textbooks and study about the atomic bombs. We learn about the Battle of Okinawa. I thought I understood the horrors of war—until last March.

Last March, the whole 11th grade of our school visited Okinawa as a part of our peace studies. At first, we were just thrilled by the bountiful nature on the small island. However, this feeling slowly changed as we learned about the horrors that took place on the island; I was, as all of my classmates, shocked by the brutal killings during the Battle of Okinawa. We were amazed to hear that many had jumped off from the very cliff that we were standing on. We saw the actual stains from the US flamethrowers on the cave walls. We all listened in complete silence as our guest speaker cried and she told us about her experiences in the Himeyuri Corps. We had actually *felt* the inhumane reality of war for the first time in our lives.

After my four days in Okinawa, I returned to my home in Kyoto feeling extremely grave. Then I realized that war was not a relic of the past. I realized that there were still wars going about all over the world. Iran, Syria, South Sudan... It gave me chills to

imagine that cruelties, similar to what took place in Okinawa, were being carried out in present times.

Realizing that, I kept asking myself the same question: why is there war? Why must we kill each other when we are all human beings?

March 2011, a massive earthquake and a tremendous tsunami hit the Tohoku region. The catastrophic earthquake shocked the world. Many people lost their homes, their families, and their whole lives. In such a situation, most people expected the region to become a lawless district. However, that was not the case. The people of Tohoku helped each other in surviving the catastrophe. There was almost no looting or raping within the region. People waited patiently in line for one small rice ball. The world marveled at this sight.

Seeing this, countries from all over the world sent rescue teams, food, and supplies. It is said that about 128 countries and 22 international organizations had supported the Tohoku region. A staggering 1,106,200 people volunteered in the first six months from all over the world. Videos calling for donations flooded YouTube. Even Lady Gaga helped by selling “Pray for Japan” wristbands.

I myself tried to help in any way. I volunteered as a staff for a gathering of the victims that had evacuated the Tohoku area and had come to Kyoto. I also created a youtube video calling for donations and received many comments expressing their concern. I met with many people who wished to help the Tohoku area. These were not only people from all over the country, but from all over the

world. The differences between countries, cultures, skin color, and perspectives did not matter. The whole world united for the people of Tohoku through the similarity that we are all human beings.

If the whole world was able to stand up and become as one for the reconstruction of the Tohoku area, why can it not stand up and become one for the abolishment of war? Why can we not realize that the victims of war are the same human beings as the victims of the Tohoku earthquake? I watched on TV a rescue team trying to save a little girl trapped in the debris of the tsunami. When the girl was eventually saved, people cheered and thanked the rescue team for saving a young life. Why can people not realize that a young girl's life in a war zone is as important as the young girl's life that was rescued in the earthquake?

It did not matter what country who was from or what perspectives they had in the instance of the Tohoku earthquake. Many stood up to save as many lives as possible despite their differences. Some may say that politics and natural disasters are completely different themes. However, as Elie Wiesel, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize said, "When human lives are endangered... national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant." The earthquake and war do not differ in the fact that human lives are in danger. National borders and sensitivities should become irrelevant in both cases also.

This bond that was seen through the Tohoku Earthquake can be applied to any of the many problems that surround the world today; poverty, emaciation, the induction of refugees, discrimination...

the list goes on. We must learn from the 311 crisis, and acknowledge how much had been accomplished through the bond that had been created across borders.

The bond that the world saw during the 311 crisis is a perfect example in the way we should behave about any of our problems that we face today. It is important to take action, as the people did at the time of the 311 earthquake, whether it be about war, poverty, or discrimination. We must not be indifferent. We must learn to overcome their differences and show the same sympathy and interest that it showed during the Tohoku earthquake, towards any of the problems that the world faces today.