

STATE & LOCAL

Crisis Hits Japan

Rebecca Brodney, Staff Writer

On March 11, northeastern Japan was struck by a 8.9-magnitude earthquake, resulting in a 23-foot high tsunami in Fukushima and a 13-foot high tsunami in Iwate. The tsunami took more than 7,600 lives and left 452,000 Japanese citizens living in shelters, with more than 11,000 people still unaccounted for. In addition to these tragedies, the tsunami also affected cooling systems at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, causing it to leak radiation. By March 16, approximately 50 major aftershocks and several comparatively small tsunamis had been reported. Warnings for tsunamis extended beyond Japan into Indonesia, Hawaii, Australia, Mexico, Chile, and Peru.

After the earthquake, over 4 million buildings in Tokyo and surrounding areas lost power, including five nuclear plants. Many people were left stranded as when train and subway service was suspended; Tokyo's two major airports, Narita and Haneda, shut down their runways as well. In spite of these difficulties and the severity of the disaster, the Japanese people remain calm. Despite food and water shortages, there has been no looting or rioting. People merely wait patiently (and often fruitlessly) in lines for provisions.

One of the biggest threats facing Japan is radiation poisoning. The six workers at the Fukushima plant were exposed to more than 100 millisieverts of radiation, which is Japan's normal limit for those working during a nuclear emergency, although the government raised the threshold to 250 millisieverts as the disasters at hand escalated. Low levels of radiation have been detected beyond Tokyo, which is about 140 miles from the plant

at Fukushima, but hazardous levels have not extended beyond the plant. The areas surrounding the plant are known greatly for their agricultural contributions, particularly with peaches, rice, and melons; radiation in these areas could exacerbate the food shortage. Tainted milk and spinach were found within 20 to 60 miles of the plant. The iodine levels found in the spinach were approximately three to seven times over the safety limit, and tests on the milk revealed that small amounts of iodine-131 (which is linked to thyroid cancer) and cesium-137 (which affects the entire body and greatly increases the risk of cancer) were present.

Japan is surprisingly the only country in the world with an earthquake early-warning system. There are 300 sensors scattered in the waters of Japan that can predict the likelihood of a tsunami and, in addition, tsunami evacuation routes are posted up and down the coast. As a result of this system, along with radio broadcasts, text messages, firemen making door-to-door calls, and years of disaster drills, the people of Japan knew to immediately get to higher ground. Yet this earthquake in conjunction with a tsunami could prove to be the most costly natural disaster in history, even in comparison with Hurricane Katrina.

If you would like to help the people of Japan, please visit www.socksforjapan.com, which allows you to send letters and clean socks directly to the Japanese people!

Sources for this article are one Yahoo! News piece titled "Japan cites radiation in milk, spinach near plant" by Eric talmadge, and two Time Magazine articles titled "Japan Rocked by Magnitude 8.9 Quake, Tsunami" by Lucy Birmingham, and "Aftermath: How Japan Will Recover from the Quake" by Hannah Beech.

Karen Refugees in Raleigh

Jee-In Hur, Staff Writer



photo via Su Alpha Stylo

Su Alpha Stylo is a middle-aged man living in a household of five, and he is a Karen refugee. He was resettled in the U.S. when he was about three years old. He lived in a refugee camp called Mae La camp in Thailand for more than ten years before he heard the announcement to apply for resettlement by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Because Karen refugees are given priority status, the process took less than one year, and the Stylo family was placed in an apartment complex that is about three miles away from Meredith. In the complex, there are more than one hundred Karens. To date, it is estimated that thousands of Karen people have made their new home in America.

I met nine-year-old Blessing, Su Alpha Stylo's daughter, in the children's ministry at my church. She is a tomboy character who is obsessed with mastering Tae Kwon Do. There is special class only for the Karen kids because English is not their first language, and many refugee children have not gotten proper education to match their age. Kindergarden started for children at age 10-11 in the camp instead of at 6. Blessing's mother, No Selda Stylo, was kind enough to invite me to her house for an interview, during which she voluntarily translated Karen to English.

According to Alpha, the Mae La refugee camp was surrounded by an electronic fence, and Thai soldiers would stand guarding the camp in order to stop those who tried to escape. The

Thai government wanted to discourage economic and social activity of the refugees in Thailand, so when refugees were found outside of the camp, they were beaten harshly. In contrast, the camps are actually a humanitarian effort to let the people have their basic survival needs met, but, like Alpha, many Karens are stuck on the primitive camp for decades--unable to pursue higher education, an occupation, travel, and other life luxuries. Alpha was a teacher for ten years in one of the schools opened by the United Nations Commission for Human Rights within the refugee camp. He taught science and math for high school and post-high school students. He said he always felt like a captive in the camp that was lacking space, and he felt trapped by the repeated routine of life without a future. Now in the United States, Alpha works at Car Quest, but he dreams of going to community college when his youngest son finishes his schooling. Alpha rides a bike to work, which takes 45 minutes, and he works until between 8 and 9:30 PM. His wife Selda misses her family members that were relocated to Australia. In the camp, everyone was nearby, but now the Atlantic Ocean separates Selda from her family. She wishes at some point in the future that she will meet her parents again while her mother is still in good health.

Internal conflict in Burma has been ongoing since its independence from Britain over half an century ago. Burma has changed its name to Myanmar, and it has historically been ruled by terror and power through military coups. Karens are one of 25 ethnic minority groups in Burma who follow the Christian religion, and this fact often makes them a target in the predominantly Buddhist country. Military powers have targeted Karens as political opposition, and more than hundreds of Karen villages have been destroyed. Many Karens have been tortured, raped, and executed. Forced to hide in the jungles, they are still in Burma living in constant fear of being discovered. More than 140,000 Karen refugees still live in the refugee camps while they wait to be resettled.

Sources for this article are three New York Times pieces: "International effort to provide opportunity to Karen refugees" by Rachel Swarns from 1/12/07. "Political situation in Myanmar, Karens hiding in the jungles" by Seth Mydans from 7/19/00. "Karen refugee camp in Thailand, the number figures and situation" by Seth Mydans from 2/23/96.

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