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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Main Committee**

**MAIN COMMITTEE**

**Japan Disaster**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 22 March 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<p><b>Date</b> Tuesday, 22 March 2011  <b>Page</b> 115  <b>Questioner</b>  <b>Speaker</b> Rishworth, Amanda, MP</p>	<p><b>Source</b> House  <b>Proof</b> Yes  <b>Responder</b>  <b>Question No.</b></p>
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**Ms RISHWORTH** (Kingston) (8.25 pm)—I rise today to support the motion outlined by the Prime Minister and to extend my sincere condolences to the Japanese people following the devastating impact of the earthquake and tsunami on their country. I would like to offer my deepest sympathies to the many families who have lost loved ones in this tragedy. The human toll of these disasters has shocked us all, with the Japanese police reporting the death toll at 8,805, with some 12,664 people still missing.

On 11 March, the largest ever earthquake was experienced in the north-east of Japan, triggering a huge tsunami that then hit the coast. I was actually in Japan at the time with some parliamentary colleagues and, despite being about 800 kilometres away from the epicentre, we still felt the movement. That is how powerful it was. However, it was not until some time after arriving in Tokyo that evening that I came to understand the sheer extent of the disaster that had occurred and the destruction it had caused. Surreal images of walls of water smashing into coastal towns in north-eastern Japan have filled the news, along with the images of fishing trawlers and vehicles being lifted and tossed around like toys. Entire towns and communities have been left flattened.

While in Japan I came to understand that earthquakes are not a new experience for the Japanese people. Japan is positioned in the most seismically active landmass in the world, and as such it experiences tremors on a regular basis. It struck me while visiting just how prepared the country was, with high-quality building codes to ensure that buildings withstand earthquakes and with locals well drilled in what to do during a quake. However, nothing can prepare a country and nothing can prepare communities for an earthquake of this magnitude or for a wall of water surging inland destroying everything in its path.

Hours after this disaster initially devastated the northern part of the country, our delegation arrived in Tokyo. The city had been shaken and the subway closed but buildings remained intact—a testament to the measures that had already been taken by the Japanese authorities to prepare this city as much as possible for earthquakes. In the face of this widespread disaster and with the threat of aftershocks looming, the Japanese people remained calm and composed. Many Japanese people were helping others in great difficulty in Tokyo. I witnessed shops and hotels offering stranded people the use of washrooms and toilets. In addition to what I witnessed, altruism was reported widely not just in Tokyo but in the hardest hit prefectures.

The Prime Minister remarked that there is a cultural tradition in Japan of courage and honour, and from reports and footage coming out of Japan each day we see that in their time of crisis these qualities have been on display right across the country. We have seen great determination from the workers and volunteers involved in the rescue and recovery effort as they have carried out their work in such dangerous and difficult circumstances. We have seen temperatures plummet to freezing. We have seen the selfless workers who have been volunteering at the troubled Fukushima energy plant and who have risked their lives to protect others.

Japan and Australia have a deep and close friendship. We are more than just trading partners. I know that it has filled all Australians with an enormous sense of grief and disbelief to see the size of the toll. The real tragedy is the human cost, and our hearts go out to the families torn apart by this dramatic disaster. On behalf of my electorate, I would like to offer the Japanese people our deepest sympathies for all those who continue to suffer.

While there has been so much devastation, there has also been the occasional ray of hope. Yesterday we heard about a grandmother and a young man who were found after nine days under the rubble. As the Prime Minister has said, we are ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with Japan to help. We deployed—and they have returned—an urban search-and-rescue team to help the Japanese emergency workers, as well as defence personnel and a C17 heavy lift aircraft to assist in the transport of personnel and equipment in Japan's disaster region. In addition, the government has announced a \$10 million donation to aid Japan in its recovery effort.

I know, after visiting there, that the Japanese people were very generous to Australia during our recent national disasters. In fact, we visited one prefecture that had donated a significant amount, and now it is our turn to repay that friendship. Despite many Australians having given after so many natural disasters that we have seen, I am

pleased that many people in my electorate on the weekend donated through me to the Australian Red Cross Japan and Pacific disaster appeal. I thank them. I know that it will be appreciated.

In addition to the many Japanese people who have been caught up in this disaster, there have also been many Australians in Japan who have needed assistance. In addition, there have been many who have lent a helping hand to their Japanese friends. I know that many have relied on help from the Australian embassy, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador McLean and all the Australian embassy staff for their efforts. While I was in Japan, I saw firsthand the dedication these staff had, working 24 hours around the clock to contact and assist Australians in Japan. It is a relief to hear that all Australians have now been accounted for. I would also like to personally extend my thanks to the embassy staff who took the delegation in and allowed us to stay in their homes when we had no accommodation on the night after the earthquake.

While I was in Japan I had the honour of visiting the Kobe earthquake research centre. It is a national centre as well as a local centre. At the centre, we saw images of the absolute devastation, pain and massive loss of life that occurred in the 1995 quake. But we also saw that the city was able to reconstruct. While the human toll will never be forgotten and the psychological scars are still there, we saw that, from this devastation, this city was able to rebuild and ensure that it functioned once again. It is a city that is very proud of all the effort and determination it took to rebuild. But they were able to do it.

Currently, we are seeing devastation in a number of prefectures in the north-east of Japan. The path to recovery is clearly going to be long and very difficult, but I have no doubt that these cities and towns will be able to rebuild. I am certain that the Japanese will face the path with enduring courage. Incredible stories of survival are constantly emerging and filling the Japanese people with hope. Here, on behalf of my electorate, I would like to again offer my sincere condolences to Japan and to all the Japanese people who have been affected by one of the worst natural disasters the country has ever endured. I will do whatever I can to assist them in their recovery.