



**The Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster and  
the National Diet Library's Research Services for the Diet  
(Parliament)**

**Kunio Yamada**  
National Diet Library  
Tokyo, Japan

**Session:** 106 — *Parliamentary libraries: strengthening democracy* — Library and Research Services for Parliaments

---

**Abstract:**

*The Great East Japan Earthquake which occurred on 11th March, 2011 and the accident of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant caused by it gave rise to a most serious disaster. The government and the Diet have had to draw up a huge amount of budget and to make and revise various laws for the purpose of coping with the disaster. The Research and Legislative Reference Bureau of the National Diet Library established a special research task force immediately after the earthquake occurred in order to facilitate our research services on the disaster, and to coordinate and implement wide cross-section research requests from the Diet Members. The Research Bureau has replied to thousands of requests which were related to the disaster on a broad range of matters. And it has issued a number of publications dealing with the various problems concerning the earthquake disaster and the nuclear accident. It has also been supporting the activities of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Investigation Commission which the Diet established last December.*

---

On Friday afternoon, 11th March, 2011, the northeastern part of Japan was hit by a great earthquake, the largest in the past 1000 years. The earthquake reading 9.0 on the Richter

scale raised a huge tsunami which recorded 43 meters high at its highest point. Almost 16,000 people lost their lives and over 3,000 people are still missing (as of 16th May, 2012). Nearly 400,000 buildings were destroyed or badly damaged.

Within 30 minutes after the quake, the then Prime Minister Kan established the Headquarters for Emergency Disaster Control, and a number of government agencies set about their work for rescue and relief within the day, including the Self-Defense Forces, the National Police Agency, the Fire Defense Board, the Maritime Safety Agency and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. The Financial Services Agency also on the same day requested that banking organs should offer as much convenience for their affected customers as possible.

However, the earthquake and tsunami that struck Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant caused the most extensive release of radioactivity since the Chernobyl accident. Next day, people living within a 20-kilometer radius of the plant received instructions to evacuate, and a few weeks later the evacuation areas were expanded. The exact number is unknown, but more than 110,000 people are said to have been obliged to leave their home towns.

The Diet needed to deliberate and decide many counter-disaster measures.

First, we would like to see financial measures. The new fiscal year of 2011 started in April with a national budget of 92 trillion yen (US\$1.1 trillion) in all. Soon a decision was passed unanimously for a supplementary budget of 4 trillion yen for disposing of rubble and rubbish, building temporary housing, restoring roads and harbors, and so on. In July a second supplementary budget of 2 trillion yen was decided to allow compensation for damage caused by the nuclear plant accident, to support the sufferers from the disaster, and related measures. In the third supplementary budget decided in November, as much as 11.7 trillion yen was prepared so that, among other things, each local government located in the disaster area could use for its own needs, and measures for cleaning up nuclear contamination could be facilitated. In addition, within the budget for this fiscal year of 2012, 3.8 trillion yen was allocated to a fund for reconstruction and revival.

Secondly, regarding legislative measures, during one year after the earthquake, about 70 bills related to such measures were submitted to the Diet, among which more than 50 have passed into law. Because our political system is a parliamentary cabinet system, most of the laws are usually submitted by the cabinet as bills and passed by both Houses. But that is not the case this time. About 30 bills out of 70 were submitted by Diet Members, among which 20 have passed.

This legislation has dealt with various matters, such as disposal of massive debris caused by the earthquake and tsunami, coping with environmental pollution caused by radioactivity, ad hoc issue of public bonds, support for restoring various businesses in disaster areas, postponement of local elections, terms of approval or renouncement of inheritance, and so on.

Now I am going to talk about how the National Diet Library has been engaged in research services for the Diet on the disaster.

Immediately after the disaster occurred, the Research and Legislative Reference Bureau of the National Diet Library established a special research task force. This task force was set up in order to facilitate our research services on the disaster, and to coordinate and implement wide cross-section research requests from the Diet Members. For this purpose, the directors of all the research Sections of the Research Bureau joined the task force, and I was appointed as the executive officer of the task force.

We can say this national crisis is one of the largest research issues that we have ever had, since this Library was established in 1948.

Because this disaster was anticipated to have many-sided aspects on a broad range of matters, we foresaw, or were worried, that too many matters would come up to be studied in short time. In fact, a lot of requests for research came to us from the Diet Members, not only for research on the disaster itself, but also for information about past great earthquakes, on how the governments, national or local, are coping or should cope with various problems, and especially on the troubles of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima.

If a request concerns simply the damage done by the earthquake, it goes to the Section for land development, and if it is about nuclear power plants, it goes to the Section dealing with industry and energy. But we needed to investigate many more matters, as the problems were expanding so much that they raised many other compounded problems. That's why almost all the Sections were involved and we needed to coordinate within the task force, just like traffic control.

For example, we had to study about governmental finance to help the people in trouble, as well as on possibility of new taxes to manage the expenses. We also had to do research about the destroyed houses, hospitals, schools, factories and towns, and about their reconstruction planning. The troubles at the nuclear plant were raising more and more problems – problems of natural environment, water to drink, food to eat, people's health,

education in schools, agriculture and fisheries, power shortages, and so on.

Some of the research requests were trans-field. I can give you a most typical example. In the week after the earthquake, we were given a legislative question; which laws can cope with restoration and relief, and which laws would be difficult to apply. Most of our Sections joined to solve this question, and within a few days we found related laws in 40 policy areas, analyzed and compiled them into one report. It was requested by only one Diet Member, but after we replied to him, the same paper was requested by many other Members, to whom we furnished it upon the original requester's approval.

Immediately after the earthquake, almost 60 per cent of all the research requests were related to the disaster. Within one year after the earthquake, we have carried out for the Diet Members more than 6,700 researches and references related to the disaster, which accounts for about 17 per cent of all the researches and references. Among these services we have given oral reports over 500 times, and written nearly 3,000 research papers. The remainder consists of replies by duplication or loan of books and other library materials.

Last December the Diet established the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Investigation Commission to conduct investigation independently from the administrative branch of the government and to make recommendations to the Diet on nuclear safety policies. The Commission models itself on the investigative special committees of the U.S. Congress. This is the first time the Japanese Diet has established an investigative commission. The National Diet Library has provided three staff members for the staff office of the Commission, and the Research Bureau is also supporting the activities of the Commission by providing information and documents.

The Research Bureau has published a number of publications concerning this crisis, most of which have been written by our own staff members. Our research task force has been helpful to coordinate this activity.

Series of *Issue Briefs* have been published dealing with key policy issues one by one in each item. Just one month after the Earthquake, we published the first one (no. 707) which deals with temporary measures on the tax system. Subsequently seventeen *Issue Briefs* in all have been published one after another. Each of them is treating, for example, the general situation of the disaster and expected counter-measures (no. 708), financial measures and their impact on the economy (no. 709), the first, second and third supplementary budgets for counter-measures (no. 711, 720 and 729), life support for the evacuees (no. 712), medical

problems in the stricken areas (no. 713), the troubles at the Fukushima nuclear plant and their effects, and others.

We have been writing related articles for *Reference*, the monthly bulletin of the Research Bureau, on the disaster and financial management for it, on mental care for children, and on disaster relief teams from abroad. Last September we released a special number of *Reference* featuring articles on the U.S. *Tomodachi* (Friends) Operation, on information provision in emergencies, on future national land planning, and on life support and employment measures.

Another bulletin of ours, *Foreign Legislation*, usually treats various foreign legislations, but a number issued in May 2011 featured a special edition dealing with reactions in the foreign countries to the troubles at the Fukushima nuclear plant, as well as some foreign legislation on nuclear policies.

We were also engaged in a comprehensive research during one year after the earthquake, inviting a number of scholars to learn and exchange ideas. The result came out as a publication this March.

All of these publications have been delivered to each Diet Member and posted on our intranet website for them, as well as our Library's internet website so that everyone can read them. We have also held a number of policy seminars for Diet Members, where the authors of our publications give lectures and exchange opinions with them.

After one year, the issues we are dealing with seem to be spreading from the earthquake and the nuclear disaster to future problems to be solved about energy shortage which might bring about various difficulties to people's lives and industries. Even a constitutional matter is being discussing on what emergency powers the state should have, on the ground that the government was criticized as having been late in responding to the disaster.

The National Diet Library and its Research Bureau will continue in their duties to provide information to the Diet Members through which we believe we can contribute to our nation's reconstruction and revival.

Since we met those tragedies, many governments and organizations, and countless people all over the world have sent words of encouragement and extended their helping hands to us. I have no words to express how we, the Japanese people, can thank them enough. I believe

that our people, never losing our hopes, are bringing our hearts together, combining our power and making great efforts to stand up on our land again.

Kunio Yamada  
Specialist, Politics and Parliamentary Affairs Research Service  
Research and Legislative Reference Bureau  
National Diet Library, Japan