

2011 Big Eastern Japan Earthquake Relief Efforts by Kozmoz International

About Kozmoz International

Kozmoz Japan is a 100% volunteer-based welfare and international aid organization based in Kyoto, Japan with sister offices in the US. It was instrumental in starting the foodbank movement in Japan, as well as other poverty-alleviation projects. And operates Second Harvest Kansai Foodbank that serves Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe primarily.

Funding

It is completely supported by its members, staff, and participants in its programs. Kozmoz does not receive any support from governmental, political or religious organizations. From its founding, Kozmoz International has been committed to self funding so as not to be subject to pressure or favor from political or religious organizations. No salaries are paid to staff, including the director. To date Kozmoz has never accepted any corporate donations because so far all who applied did not meet its code of requirements designed to prevent the “whitewashing” of corporate image.

Mission

Founded in 1987 (in the US) as Family International with the goal of sharing wealth with underprivileged neighbors, its main office is now in Japan. Kozmoz is not politically partisan, and though it has Christian roots, the goal is to include people of all political backgrounds and faiths who share a hope for a better future.

Ongoing and Past Projects/Activities

- Food bank: organizing and redistributing food to where it is needed locally (i.e. in western Japan)
- International internships in Thailand, Japan, Mexico and the US.
- Initiating and supporting aid projects e.g. including for illegal immigrants to the US, prisoners etc.
- Education for underprivileged people
- Runs Café and English School in Kyoto to raise funds and spread awareness
- “Always taking unconventional steps to provide for a great need that exists outside of existing institutions”

Relief Efforts in 2011 Japan Earthquake (as of March 22, 2011)

Kozmoz International Japan is currently gathering food stocks and funds for the grief stricken in the North Part of Japan. The roads have been provisionally opened and the first trucks with relief supplies have started to get through. Presently, Kozmoz is soliciting and delivering food stocks, daily necessities and emergency funds. Kozmoz will focus on providing funds and rice to be followed with providing essentials and **continual**

support over the coming year. Kozmoz coordinates with local food banks and similar organizations in the affected areas. The first truck is scheduled to leave Kyoto on March 28 with 4 tons of food with more to follow as funds become available. The director will travel to the affected area on March 21, 2011 to assess the situation personally. Further deliveries will be dispatched as soon as funds allow. To promote its effort, Kozmoz launched the 1 million poster campaign, asking people to download, print and hang posters reminding people of the ongoing crisis as media coverage is shifting away.

Priorities for 2011 Japan Earthquake Relief Effort in the words of the director

The quickest and most effective way to bring food aid to the victims is to use foodbanks. We need a lot of funds and we need them as quickly as we can. We need these funds to gather foodstuffs and essentials. We need these funds to bring aid and support other local groups that do not have a financial base like we do to assure a base level of operation.

And as such we need to make sure that the funding is being channeled properly. Our immediate goals are as follows:

1. Get food to those that need it in the affected regions.

We collect rice and funds to buy rice and oil packed tuna, which provide maximum amount of calories and protein per kg of food.

There is a perception that there is no power and water to cook rice. That is not true. Of course there are vast areas without power, but refugee centers are primarily set up in schools which have commercial kitchens, emergency power and the ability to serve great numbers of people.

2. Get essentials to the victims

Many left their houses or were washed away with nothing. They need toilet paper, toothbrushes, hairbrushes, hair bands, tooth paste, feminine products, diapers, formula, baby clothes, blankets, warm clothes, shoes, socks, etc.

3. Assist the Tohoku Food Bank Again to regain function as soon as possible.

Food banks are the most effective way to bring both short term emergency aid and long term aid to the community. There are going to be extreme needs in the area for at least 3 years, based on our experience with the Hanshin Great Earthquake in Kobe Japan. They had people still living in refugee temporary housing for as long as 6 years after the earthquake. The Food Bank serving Sendai and the Tohoku region has been badly damaged and is currently unable to function.

We will try to secure access to a remote refuge station/ emergency shelter. If we cannot get access in time, we will deliver the first truckload to the National Food Bank aid station.

4. Provide ongoing assistance to the Tohoku Food Bank

With our support, they will be able to serve their own area and become able to open satellite centers in Fukushima and Iwate prefectures to provide more efficient distribution of food and aid.

Why deliver aid through a small group like Kozmoz?

In the 1996 Kobe earthquake, the government response was slow and inefficient. A large number of people were left without help for too long, especially foreign residents, people with disabilities, families with small children, etc. As a result, a large number of small groups sprang up to address the needs of different communities in the affected area. The words “volunteer” and “NPO” first became part of the Japanese popular vocabulary.

In this crisis, the Government has promoted a lock down on aid provision for the devastated area to keep order. However, this has brought additional hardship and unnecessary delays to the victims. The mayor of Sendai made a passionate appeal on TV on Wednesday March 16, 2011 which is a very un-Japanese thing to do. He wanted everyone to know that his people were suffering greatly and criticized the governments’ refusal to allow commercial delivery vehicles to transport aid to the affected areas. There are NOT ENOUGH GOVERNMENT VEHICLES to move the supplies. As well, many aid workers right now are foreigners because the government has clamped down on smaller Japanese organization participating in the aid effort. The government’s effort to keep order, promote efficiency and prevent fraud is laudable, however it is so inflexible as to add unnecessarily to victims’ suffering. Centralized efforts have their place, but they can never address all needs.

The government is issuing media reports to sway Japanese public opinion against non-governmental aid organizations and reducing our ability to maintain the needed level of volunteer and financial support. **The general directive is for people not to send food nor to volunteer as it will cause additional chaos.** However, it is worded so simply as to leave people confused about what is effective vs. what is a source of trouble. True, there have been cases of people that have loaded up their cars with food and clothing and set off without regard for road conditions and limited gas supplies, only to find themselves stranded somewhere along the road in need of rescue themselves. But the government and media are using these cases to discourage citizens from taking any action at all. **Of course, groups such as ours that do this kind of work on a regular basis use strong commercial delivery vehicles with a wide range and auxiliary fuel tanks.** After delivering aid under very difficult conditions in Mexico and supporting activities in Africa, I think we can do the job here well.

Groups such as ours that are uniquely positioned to bring quick and effective aid. That is what we do on an everyday basis. We collect food locally, and distribute it to people in need locally and also support other areas that find themselves short of resources . However such groups COULD solicit funding and resources that we could deliver greatly multiplying the ability to provide.

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