

The European Union's response to the earthquake and nuclear plant situation in Japan

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Since the devastating earthquake which struck Japan on Friday 11 March, the European Union is fully mobilised to translate its solidarity in concrete support.

On 11 March, President Barroso and President Van Rompuy issued the following statement: "We are deeply concerned at the news of the devastating earthquake which has struck Japan, causing a number of fatalities and serious material damage. The European Union expresses its solidarity and condolences to the people and government of Japan, and to the families of the victims at this difficult time. We stand ready to assist in any way we can in case of need."

High Representative/Vice-President Ashton met with Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Yakeaki Matsumoto on 14 March in the context of the G8 foreign ministers meeting in Paris. She expressed sympathy and solidarity of the EU with Japanese people and reaffirmed the EU's offer of support.

The European Commission has taken stock of the situation at its meeting on 16 March.

The European Union Civil protection assistance

On 15 March, Japan requested assistance through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (MIC) to deal with consequences of massive earthquake and tsunami. [See statement by President Barroso in [MEMO/11/174](#)]. The request led to immediate offers from several Member States. The Commission's Civil Protection Mechanism is coordinating the EU's response to ensure a fully joined-up and targeted European response.

The request for blankets, mattresses, water bottles/tanks and water purification units, was immediately communicated to all participating states; further needs are being clarified. Given the very difficult conditions on the ground and complex large-scale national relief operation, a genuinely joined-up European response package is essential.

France and Sweden have already made offers through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in response to the request, and more offers are expected shortly.

A Commission's humanitarian expert was dispatched to join the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) mission in Japan on Saturday. Since 14 March, the EU Delegation in Tokyo was also reinforced with the MIC liaison officer tasked to establish direct contacts with the Japanese authorities. An EU Civil Protection Assessment and Coordination Team of 10 experts is ready to leave any moment to coordinate the upcoming assistance on the ground. The experts will be supported by a Technical Assistance and Support Team (TAST) with a radiological/nuclear component to make them fully autonomous. The EU Situation Centre has activated its consular online webpage to exchange information on EU-citizens possibly affected in the region.

Situation in Japan's nuclear plants

The EU Commission is getting information from the International Atomic Energy Agency on the situation

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in Japan on a regular basis.

To assess the Japanese situation and EU's state of preparedness in case of similar incidents, Commissioner Günther Oettinger called an ad-hoc coordination meeting on Tuesday 15 March, with all 27 national nuclear safety authorities and all operators and vendors of nuclear power plants in the EU. Commissioner Oettinger gave first hand information to the European Parliament on Tuesday 15 March evening.

What was the outcome of Tuesday's ad-hoc meeting on nuclear safety?

There was consensus among all stakeholders to take joint work forward on voluntary stress test of nuclear power plants. The EU will also look into possibilities to commit neighbouring countries and the international level towards undertaking such voluntary stress tests as well.

Which are the EU and Member States respective competences for nuclear safety?

With the EU Directive on Nuclear Safety, the EU has established a legal framework for the safety of nuclear power plants. It says that Member States shall provide for national rules, the licence of nuclear power plants and the safety supervision. This means that national safety authorities do the inspections of the nuclear power plants and check whether contingency plans and safety standards are in place. Member States have to set up and continuously improve national safety rules. The Directive (2009/71/Euratom) makes the Safety Standards of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) partially legally binding and enforceable in the EU.

The EU is responsible for radiation protection and safeguards measures. Radiation protection aims to ensure the protection of the health of workers and the public against dangers from ionizing radiation. Our experts go to nuclear power plants and other places to check whether the Member States have established the facilities necessary to carry out continuous monitoring of radioactivity. Our safeguards experts control on the spot that special fissile materials are not diverted from their intended uses as declared. These control mechanisms are, inter alia, in place to rule out that uranium designed for civic purposes is used for building an atomic bomb.

Diplomatic action

The EU Delegation in Tokyo has remained in continuous and active contact with the Japanese authorities since the initial earthquake on Friday. It is playing an active role in monitoring all aspects of the evolving situation around the clock. The Delegation is also helping to coordinate the activities of EU member states' diplomatic missions in Japan, who have set up a network to facilitate information flow and to ensure prompt and efficient response to the needs arising.

Member States' consular offices in Japan are operating, in close coordination with the EU delegation in Tokyo. Citizens are invited to contact their embassies and to follow the Japanese authorities' advice.

Most Member States are advising against non-essential travel to Japan and in particular to the most affected areas of the country.