Official Booklet

A booklet about the Kumamoto earthquakes and the efforts of the Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project to record the experiences of the foreign residents and use this information to help build a better Japan for all.
“Don’t you feel gallant and fresh winds blowing to you from the future society?” Kenji Miyazawa, the famous poet, said this in his poetry. The Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project (KEEP) is a volunteer organization created by international students studying at Kumamoto University, Japan. The members come from all over the world. They are contributing to create a future society beyond nationality: I feel their action is the real gallant wind from the future.

In April 2016, huge earthquakes, seismic intensity level seven, struck twice in Kumamoto prefecture. The aftershocks continued everyday, the number of shocks reached several thousand within a month. Many houses collapsed; the furniture turned over in rooms; lifelines such as water, electricity, gas, highways and the Shinkansen train services were disrupted. Everyone living here had frightening and unforgettable experiences. International students and Japanese were forced to evacuate from their own houses to protect themselves. Foreigners living in Kumamoto also had similarly hard experiences.

The news of the Kumamoto earthquakes was broadcast around the world, unsteadying people, and many offers of sympathy came and went. The news, however, did not convey well what people had thought during the natural disaster nor how they acted during it. Furthermore, the memory of our fears and the wonderful experience of human kindness that touched us in times of such a crisis is fading away rapidly from our recollection.

KEEP was made in order to record the thoughts and experiences of international students and to disseminate them to the international community. They have collected international student essays and conducted many interviews with people. This effort is published on websites such as Facebook, and is now being shared through this booklet. I hope the story of the Kumamoto earthquake experience will be shared with people around the world, and will be useful for the future society.

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In April 2016, Kumamoto prefecture in Kyushu, Japan, suffered two major earthquakes of an intensity not seen since the Tohoku earthquake of 2011. Dozens died and life was brought to a standstill as the once bustling province was ravaged by collapsed buildings and bridges, derailed trains, and landslides which will scar the countryside here for a generation. Kumamoto was reduced in mere seconds to a natural disaster zone.

Many foreign residents found life especially tough. Some could not speak Japanese and struggled to get help, or could not understand what was happening when virtually all released information was in Japanese. Most had no earthquake awareness training. Others found their dietary or religious needs hard to fulfil. All however shared in the fear and uncertainty of not knowing when the next earthquake would strike or where the next meal would come from.

Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project (KEEP), started in May 2016, is an initiative by graduate students at Kumamoto University. It aims to collect and convey the experiences of those who experienced the Kumamoto earthquakes in April 2016. We held a successful workshop in July 2016 in Kumamoto, where many people of all nationalities were able to gather and share their stories. Whilst every story was different, many shared the same themes of fear in the aftermath of the earthquake and the solidarity between the foreign and Japanese residents. From the success of that workshop, we as a team decided to carry on the project and ensure the voice of those affected can be heard across the globe.

This booklet is dedicated to the experiences of the residents who lived through the Kumamoto earthquakes, and the story of this project which aims to share them. Thank you for reading and we hope you find the information here of interest.

The KEEP team

March 2017
In April 2016 a series of earthquakes struck Kumamoto prefecture, with the biggest quake of magnitude 7.3 striking at approximately 01:25 on the 16th April. Experts stated that the Kumamoto earthquakes were similar to the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 which struck Kobe, killing six thousand people.

Often large tremors hit first, followed by smaller aftershocks: this was not the case in Kumamoto. The foreshock, magnitude 6.5, hit Kumamoto on Thursday 14th April at 21:26, with the main shock, magnitude 7.3, hitting 28 hours later. Authorities concluded that the shaking affected much wider areas than other quakes in the past.

It is very uncommon for earthquakes to occur in Kumamoto, catching relevant authorities (i.e. fire service, police, local government) by surprise. This differs to places like Tokyo where authorities have detailed disaster contingency plans. The scale of the disaster was huge: there were landslides; parts of Kumamoto were left without water, gas, and electricity; numerous structures collapsed or caught fire. Important cultural monuments also collapsed, as can be seen below in the photos taken post-quake of the iconic Kumamoto Castle.

The Asian Disaster Reduction Centre reported estimation caused by damages worth 2.4. to 4.6 trillion yen.
According to the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, one thousand two hundred and fifty-eight people were injured with the death toll standing at 49 people. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, upon receiving the news, instructed over twenty-thousand rescuers comprising of firefighters, defence force personnel and police, to help in the affected disaster zone.

Authorities reported that more than forty-four thousand residents were evacuated to schools and community centres throughout Kumamoto prefecture. Most people living in Kumamoto were displaced during the earthquakes.
and were forced to evacuate their homes without basic supplies. The shortages of relief supplies reported by disaster management officials during the aftermath of the earthquake highlighted the unpreparedness of government officials.

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<th>Peak damage</th>
<th>Recovery situation</th>
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<td>Highways</td>
<td>Many road surfaces damaged, 33 sections of bridge damaged, landslides</td>
<td>All traffic regulations had been lifted by 29th April</td>
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<td>National roads</td>
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<td>As of 24th May, seven sections were blocked, bypass routes were available</td>
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<td>Railways</td>
<td>Much damage to private railway tracks, facilities, and stations</td>
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<td>Ports</td>
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Source: Asian Disaster Reduction Center: 2016 Earthquake Survey report

The local government passed several laws and issued various plans to rebuild Kumamoto prefecture in the aftermath of the earthquake. Makeshift homes were built and vital utility services such as electricity and water were quickly restored. The earthquake left many people with bad memories, but it also brought out the community spirit that the Japanese are famous for: organisations worked side by side with local authorities to begin rebuilding Kumamoto. Many foreigners expressed gratitude for the warmness they received from the Japanese community and likewise, the Japanese also felt a sense of connection during the course of this experience. Kumamoto is slowly regaining a sense of its former self as the reconstruction work continues.
In the aftermath of the earthquakes, as Kumamoto slowly started to return to some sense of normalcy, many foreign residents were still quite frightened about what was happening. There were still strong aftershocks almost every day, with a sense of uncertainly as to whether there would be another big one. Even though the shops were again full of food, some neighbourhoods remained without gas. People may have received help from members of their own community or from their neighbours, but they were unaware of what had happened to others within the city.

A number of graduate students at Kumamoto University came together in May 2016 and decided to organise a project to try and do something for the foreign residents: the Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project. The first thing the team decided to do was to organise a workshop, so that people could share their experiences. Planning to use the world café format, one where participants shift tables frequently in order to meet the most people, arrangements were made to hold an event at the Parea building in central Kumamoto city on the 26th July.
The day was sweltering and humid but clear; from the 9th floor of Parea there was a beautiful view of the castle. The workshop started to fill and in the end around forty people participated.

The event opened with an introduction by the event organisers, with the format being explained to the participants. Then we started. There were three rounds of fifteen minutes each, with participants then moving to a table with new people. The stories of people were fascinating and everybody was happy to contribute what they had been through both during and in the aftermath of the earthquakes. After this, people returned to their original tables and a volunteer from each came to the front to share what they had learned from the event.

Questionnaires were collected from the participants so that further research could be done on the effects of the earthquake on the residents of Kumamoto. Many people as they were leaving thanked KEEP for their efforts, for allowing them a chance to discuss with others their fears and uncertainties, and for allowing people to understand each other through sharing their experiences.

A number of reporters were at the workshop, keen to understand the foreign experience of the earthquakes. One reporter after the event said that he had not realised the amount of cooperation between the foreign and Japanese residents, a fact he found pleasantly surprising. The workshop also attracted interest from NHK Kumamoto, who interviewed KEEP’s executive members about why they were running such an event. This story was then broadcast on NHK news in the following days, as well as being printed about on the NHK news website.

As for KEEP, the value of the workshop to the attendees exceeded our expectations, as did the findings we discovered from the questionnaires. From this we decided as a group to keep KEEP going and to push on with this project, to see how we could contribute more to Kumamoto in the wake of the earthquakes.
The Kumamoto Experiences Earthquake Project (KEEP) conducted a survey of 25 workshop attendees by questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire was to gain information about the participants that were affected by the earthquake in April 2016. We also wanted to gather experiences from the questionnaire so that the data gathered could be placed into a booklet in order to inform and share the experiences with our families, our friends, and the larger community in Kumamoto city and overseas.

As for the formulation of the questions, the KEEP committee came up with four questions which were arranged in a cascading format. The four questions asked the participants about their location when the earthquakes struck, the help they received, their experiences and their opinion on how we all can help prepare and prevent some of the obstacles faced during the earthquakes.

There were two earthquakes in Kumamoto during the time of the disaster and question one of the questionnaire wished to find out on the location of the participants. According to the collected data, 56 percent of the participants were at their respective homes, 28 percent were in their lab and the rest were hanging out with their friends. During the second earthquake, 48 percent of the participants moved into shelters provided either by Kumamoto University or the local authorities. 36 percent of the participants were at home and 16 percent were in shelters.
percent were with their friends either in their apartments or camping outside their apartments. Most participants after the first earthquake moved to various shelters to take cover and seek comfort while the rest preferred their homes or to stay with friends.

The follow-up of question two asked the participants about the help received during the disasters. The participants, when asked, stated that they received help from their neighbors, community, their school mates or the city authorities. The participants agreed that the help that they received were through text messages, phone call and verbal communication directing them to the nearest shelter. 48 percent of the participants stated that they received information directing them to one of the shelters in Kumamoto city, 20 percent indicated they received basic emergency information such as emergency contact numbers of fire service, news websites (i.e. TV news, Facebook, LINE etc.) and police. 28 percent of the participants received basic necessities (i.e. water, food, blankets, torch etc) and 4 percent stated none. The second question pointed out that indeed help was given to the participants in various forms.

The help given to the participants by various public and private institutions (such as the universities, community, neighborhoods, friends) were very much appreciated by the 25 participants. The third question asked each of the 25 participants of what they learned from the experience. All 25 participants agreed on the importance of sharing information pointing out that most of the information provided was in the Japanese language. The Japanese language information proved difficult to understand for the participants that had a low-level of Japanese proficiency and the emergency pamphlets were also hard to follow. 56 percent of the participants agreed on the need for emergency information for foreign students to be in English. 44 percent stressed the need for English interpreters to be stationed at the shelters during disasters. Question three highlighted the need for English information for foreigners.
Question four allowed for the input of the 25 participants to share their opinions on what can be done in future disaster situations. 80 percent of the participants stressed the need for English guidance in times of disaster. The participants stated that although help was given, the information and the help given in the shelters was all in Japanese and this resulted in difficulties on what to do and what to expect. The other 20 percent indicated the need for some sort of evacuation drills conducted in preparation for future disasters.

The KEEP committee would like to thank all the 25 participants in the workshop and those who gave their time in filling out the questionnaire. The four questions enabled KEEP to move forward the views expressed by the participants and share these views with everyone.
After the success of the workshop and the interesting information we gained from the questionnaires, KEEP decided to deepen its research activities through focus group interviews.

The aim of a focus group is to prompt and then allow the participants to speak openly about their thoughts and feelings. There is no right or wrong answer to give, what is important is recording the participant’s views as accurately as possible.

KEEP’s focus group participants were asked a series of four questions, from which our general findings are shown below.

**Question 1**
*Where were you and what did you do when the two earthquakes struck Kumamoto?*

Most of the participants stated that they were either at their apartment or dormitory when the two earthquakes struck Kumamoto. Only one participant was in a restaurant having dinner with her family. After the first earthquake, half of the participants went to the shelters provided by Kumamoto University while the other half stayed within their apartments because they didn’t think that the first earthquake was life threatening.

**Interesting fact:** since the second earthquake was much bigger it really put most foreigners on edge, most of them got scared and worried about their safety. They really saw this as a frightening experience, mainly because they do not experience strong earthquakes like that back in their countries.

**Question 2**
a. *In the two weeks after, who did you talk to a lot about the earthquakes?*

All of the participants stated that they spoke to their families first just to let them know what had happened and that they were OK. After family were friends. The majority of the participants called to talk with friends from their countries living in Kumamoto, after that they talked with class mates. Lastly, the national embassies of two participants called them to check if they were OK.
Interesting fact: Participants talked more to their families and people from their own countries because they felt at peace talking to people they could relate to.

b. In the future, who would you call first to talk to?
Most participants indicated that they would call their class or lab mates first, then people from their countries, and finally their professors. This is to tell them that they are OK and so that they could share information about the earthquake together.

c. Where did you get information about the earthquakes from?
The majority of the participants stated that they got information about the earthquakes from their friends, especially through LINE (a SNS service) groups with friends and secondly, KUMISA (Kumamoto University International Students Association). After friends you had social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter, and for other participants who knew Japanese they got their information from the TV and from the Japanese news.

Interesting fact: From the results it can be stated that foreigners feel more comfortable in getting information from their friends rather than other information outlets like the Kumamoto news or the University.

d. Was this information helpful?
All of the participants acknowledged that the information that they got from their information source were helpful, the level of helpfulness varied however. For example, most of the information on the earthquake on the news and on social media was in Japanese. Some of the participants didn’t understand this because they did not know how to read Japanese. KUMISA’s LINE group was the most helpful because it provided information about the earthquake in English. The information was helpful because it provided information to the participants on the damage done, where shelters were, where to buy food and water, news on transport services to get out of Kumamoto, etc.

Interesting fact: Some information instead of helping people made them panic even more. In emergency times like during an earthquake situation, it’s good to get information from the news because it is a third party and is neutral, not from other friends because the information they give might be affected by their emotions.
**Question 3**  
**What did you learn from this experience?**

50% of the participants had learnt that keeping calm and not panicking was important, especially for emergency cases like this. The others stated that they had learnt the importance of sharing and filtering information.

*Interesting experiences learnt:* One person keeping calm can help others keep calm during times like this, while people who panic will make others panic too. Try to keep, or at least pretend, to keep calm during such times. In addition, get earthquake insurance in case some of your valuables are damaged by an earthquake, and also make an attempt to learn and read Japanese characters in preparation for natural disasters. Furthermore, when you are going to a new place try to at least assess the possible threats and risks that are likely to happen in those areas. Lastly, be prepared for such an emergency like this. You should have an emergency bag always ready for situations like these.

**Question 4**  
**From your opinion, what can be done to help foreigners during times like this?**

Recommendations from participants:
- There should more information about such emergencies translated to English. We got information but we couldn’t understand it because it was in Japanese, this made us panic even more.

- Institutions like the universities and embassies should give more information about such emergencies to the students.

- People should not be ignorant and should read information booklets or pamphlets on natural disasters provided by different institutions like Kumamoto University and the Center for Globalization in Kumamoto

- Kumamoto lacks useful signs for foreigners. All the signs are in Japanese. These should be translated to English for the sake of foreigners who do not know how to read Japanese. Pictures can be very useful.

- Kumamoto University should conduct earthquake simulation training for foreign students.
My name is Mariam Piruzyan. I am from Armenia. I have been studying in Japan for 6 years and currently am a 1st year student of Graduate School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Kumamoto University. The Kumamoto earthquake was the second time I experienced an earthquake in Japan. The first one was the Tohoku Pacific Ocean Earthquake, in 2011. I was in Tokyo and the earthquake occurred on the day of my graduation from Japanese language school. In this essay, I will tell you the story of my experience during the Kumamoto earthquake.

April 14, 2016.

I was riding my bicycle when suddenly I heard a strange sound like some old grandmothers (or imaginary ghosts) laughing. I looked back and thought it a little scary and than a strong bumping occurred in the ground. I lost the control of my bicycle, and fell down. I looked up and saw the buildings shaking, but my eyes were focused on the traffic light, which was moving very intensely. All the cars stopped immediately, and for a second I didn’t know what to do - to stay there for a while or continue on my way. But because the light was green for me to pass, I continued on my way.

I was scared and tried to call my mom in Armenia, but wasn’t able to get through. A lot of people were outside. Many people were crying, which made me even more scared and worried. There was lot of broken glass from the windows of buildings.

Messages from my university friends told me to come to the university, because our gymnasium was one of the evacuation places. But before going there I really wanted to go to my apartment, check some things, change my clothes, etc. My apartment is on the 4th floor. I tried to go up three times, but it was in vain. Each time I stepped on the first step, the shakes would start again. Eventually I managed to go up, to change my clothes, to prepare some warm clothes and to get some water and snacks for later. I put some important things under my bed, turned off the water, took all the electrical plugs out and then made my way to the university.
When I reached the gymnasium, there were already a lot of people. When I saw my friends, unconsciously tears flowed from my eyes. I think maybe I felt relieved. All the keys, including the key for the gymnasium were kept inside the administrative office. Unfortunately, the administrative office was already closed at that hour. So one of the students took a fire extinguisher and broke the window of the administration office, went inside and took the keys. It was a very admirable action for me. The fact that he didn't wait until a superior gave him orders or instructions. He acted from his heart. For people’s sake a broken window can be considered just a small side effect. Another student held hands with an old woman and slowly brought her to university. Probably she was even not thinking about herself. She felt the responsibility and respect for elderly people and that was above everything else.

Along with other students, I too started working immediately. Among the many things we did - we blew up the air mattresses we had and distributed water and snacks to the people who were now in the gymnasium. That night we all stayed in the university gymnasium. Before going to sleep, I tried to analyze the day’s events. I realized that the feeling of panic (or being scared) and the feeling of love are similar. They both give you the same strange, unpleasant feeling in one’s stomach. And lastly, I was happy to be alive and realized that I still had a lot of things to do.

April 15.

I woke up, but hadn’t slept well because I was cold, stressed, and the ground was shaking all night long. One of the student’s parents brought and gave us (me and other students) a lot of rice balls and tea. We were very happy and thankful. After we had breakfast, I and a few of my laboratory members checked the condition of the laboratory.
Next, after spending some time in the laboratory with friends, I went to my apartment. It was in good condition. I had water and electricity. I didn’t know about the gas, because I was afraid to check it. I got calls from the Embassy of Armenia in Japan several times, but because I was concentrating on my work I didn’t notice it at first. But then I got a direct call from the ambassador asking me to go to Tokyo to stay with him and his family. Or, they could provide me with a hotel in Fukuoka or in Tokyo. And, he even offered to send me to my country for some time. I really appreciated his kindness and desire to help (very kind people). However, I hesitated, because I thought that now my help was needed here more. Running away is not my personality, though I was really happy for the offer.

On my way back to the university I bought some bread for myself and my laboratory friends. The master of the bakery gave me extra bread for free. I was
really touched and happy. When I got to the university, some of my laboratory members had already gone to their home cities, but some were still there.

Suddenly I heard foreigners’ voices. I realized that they didn’t understand Japanese and were asking questions in English. The guide of the gymnasium had a hard time answering. At first I didn’t know whether to interfere or not, but then decided to help. The foreigners asked whether this was the place of evacuation and if they could come to stay here. There were about 11 of them. I told them it was okay. As it turned out, there were not 11 but 40 people with small kids and babies. The guide informed us that the lights would be turned off at eleven o’clock, and after that to please stay quiet, because people are sleeping.

No sooner had I found a place and laid down, the second earthquake began - the main shock. The basketball hoops were moving so strongly that I thought they were going to be torn off and fall on people. Then the lights went out and all was dark. Instructions were given for everyone to get out of the building. First, I found my senior. We moved into her car and turned the head-lights of the car on to light the surrounding place. Soon another laboratory member joined us. She was full of tears, because she had experienced another earthquake when she was little, so this was quite traumatic. We followed the news. The number of local people was growing and growing. So we decided to move the people onto the sports grounds. It was cold outside, but the sports grounds were wider and safer and luckily it was not raining. I gave instructions in English for foreigners who didn’t understand Japanese. One of the students, who delivered blankets to local people, took off his socks and gave them to a small kid who was very cold. Some students used their cars like ambulances. They carried injured people to hospitals and were on duty all day long. The attitude of Japanese students towards local people was similar to doctors’ attitudes towards patients - very caring and open hearted. They went on rounds, did some primitive checking up, and gave free consultations.

April 16

In the morning we collected the garbage from the gymnasium and cleaned up. After that I went to my apartment, had a shower and rested. At dinner time because there was a need for help, I went back to the university. The dinner was cup noodles. The students were divided into two groups. One group was in charge of boiling water at any place where there was electricity, and the other
group was to provide it to people. It sounds easy, but it was really tough work because there were not enough students to do the work. We literally ran around trying not to see the angry and dissatisfied faces of people. That night I didn’t want to stay at the university, so I went back home. During my stay at my apartment, for my own safety, I wore a helmet which I got from a friend. I didn’t take it off even while sleeping.

My Skype was always on. My parents were so worried that my mom even didn’t go to work in order to be able to be in touch with me all day long. That night was the first night I was able to sleep properly.

April 17 – April 19

Because there was talk saying that another big earthquake would happen, one night of those nights I stayed at one of my friend’s apartment and another day my friend came to my apartment. I realized that it is not so scary when you are not alone. Because my apartment had gas and water, many of my friends came to take a shower. I was happy being useful.

During this period some students took volunteer jobs at the epicenter of the earthquake (at the most damaged area). I think of them as very courageous. Even the students far from Kumamoto gathered and held meetings at different stations and collected funds to support the quick recovery of Kumamoto.

Our professors also always supported, cared, cheered and gave us useful advice. Thanks to them and our collaborators and the alumni of the university, we were able to collect a lot of supplies.

Although in Japan there is a strong and strict hierarchy (coming from ancient times), I realized that during disaster they become one and behave like long lost relatives or friends. I can say that I have learned a lot from them. In 2011, during the Tohoku Pacific Ocean Earthquake at Tokyo, I was living in a dormitory for foreign students. We were young, inexperienced and lost, not knowing what to do. And actually we did nothing, just gathered together in one room and followed the news. Comparing my behavior back then and now, I can proudly say that I have grown a lot, and partially it is thanks to Japanese people.

On April 19, because there was nothing left to do in the university, and the
classes were postponed for a long time, I realized that I had 2 free weeks. And I decided to go back to my country for these two weeks.

**April 20**

In the morning the bakery was already open and working. So I bought some bread for my friends and me, took my baggage and went to my laboratory. One of my laboratory staff members had come back from Fukuoka, and had made a very tasty lunch full of vegetables, meat, and other healthy tasty foods, fruits, things we missed from our diets for some days. After lunch, we left for Fukuoka.

**April 21 - May 5** Back to my country (Armenia)

Once a year I take vacation from my laboratory and go back to my country. This time compared to prior times my flight and stay at the airport went very smoothly. The officers at passport control and baggage registration were for the moment changed into very kind and understanding people; when checking my residence card and seeing that I am from Kumamoto. They asked me about current condition of Kumamoto and told me to take good care of myself. The interesting thing that was really touching was that the airport workers apologized to me, for not having helped Kumamoto even though they are Japanese. They told me that they would pray for Kumamoto.

I reached Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. My parents were at the airport to welcome me. I was so happy to see them. In my eyes my mother appeared very stressed and tired. She looked as though she had lost a lot of weight. This was not her first experience with an earthquake. During 1988, northern Armenia had a great earthquake which struck Gyumri, my mother’s birthplace. Her mother died in that earthquake. I never met her but have heard about her a lot. She was a very clever doctor and was loved and respected by everyone. She died at the hospital with her patient during surgery. So this was an unbearable fear for my mother. I had really missed my father’s warmth, too. There was another surprise waiting me at home. I went home and saw that my brother...
was using orthopedic casts. He had broken his leg while playing football and went through very complicated surgery. My parents had kept it a secret in order to not make me even more worried and stressed. During my two weeks stay I mainly spent time with my family.

One day I visited the cathedral at Etchmiadzin, the mother Church of Armenia. It is considered to be the oldest cathedral in the world. At Etchmiadzin I lighted candles and prayed for Armenia, for Kumamoto, for my family and friends.

The time there passed too quickly. It was hard to separate from my family and my city, but I knew that I have still a lot of things to do and study. So I had to go back to Japan. At the airport I had difficulty keeping back my tears, but I didn't cry, I separated with a wide smile on my face, in order to not make my parents worried. When the airplane took off, my heart started to beat very fast, I felt anxious already missing everything. I really enjoyed my days spent with my loved ones. And the view of my beautiful city Yerevan with Holy Mt. Ararat is always something worth seeing.

Making some comparisons and briefly talking about the 1988 Armenian earthquake (also known as the Spitak earthquake) that occurred in the northern region of Armenia on December 7. During this devastating earthquake up to 45,000 people died and more than 500,000 were left homeless. Many humanitarian agencies arrived for help from all over the world. The magnitude of the earthquake was 7.0 and the intensity 10. Interestingly, Kumamoto earthquake began with a foreshock of magnitude 6.5, next day continuing the mainshock of magnitude 7.3, intensity 10. 49 people were killed and 44,000 evacuated. The conditions of these two earthquakes have
similarities however the damage scale differs greatly.

So probably by now through our experiences, we might have gained basic knowledge on actions during disasters. And I hope that not only in Armenia, but also in other developing countries, construction is seismically stable without substandard infrastructures. I wish the governments could think more about safety of people than about their budget, because people’s lives are not a joke.

I would like to add that through these Kumamoto earthquake experiences I learned that we must act very fast. If during the earthquake we are inside the building we have to stay in a place where nothing will fall on us from above. Then, turn off the gas, collect water, shut the water off and take only needed things and then get out to a safer place. Then confirm our safety (our place and that we are safe), and follow the news. We need to give help to people who are more in need. There must be no greed - we must share everything. I really feel very thankful and appreciate everyone who helped me in any way. I felt strong, happy, supported, relaxed, getting messages from a lot of people around the world, giving me words of comfort, cheer and their readiness for help if I need them. I never felt lonely, which was very important. And I grew stronger.

In the end, I would like to add my point of view for future cases (hopefully not needed). The things that can be done to help foreigners in such situations is to give them easy understandable instructions in English. But first of all, to hold briefings about “What to do in case of disasters” when the foreigners first move to Japan and into a new apartment (because the evacuation place, the markets that work and provide important supplies are located in different places depending where you live).

Famous Armenian cross-stones (on the left) and Cathedral at Etchmiadzin (on the right)
The Kumamoto University International Students Association (KUMISA) was established with the purpose of being the bridge between Kumamoto and the international students at Kumamoto University, and to help them (among other things) to adapt to their lives in Japan. Since its beginnings in 2015, we have been connected by the mobile messaging applications Facebook and LINE, which played a major role during the earthquake among our international community.

I come from Guatemala, an earthquake prone country in Central America. Thanks to that, I’ve acquired experience which became really useful during the Kumamoto earthquakes, and thanks to the KUMISA network I was able to share it. One’s own safety comes first. After assuring mine, the next thing was to check on the rest of the international students and warn them about the aftershocks. For many students this was their first time to experience an earthquake. Sharing information was vital because two of the biggest dangers after an earthquake are panic and misinformation.

Japan’s response to any natural disaster is amazing, and since the first earthquake struck in Kumamoto I was amazed at how fast the reaction was. In less than ten minutes a patrolling group was checking on my neighborhood. Suddenly, I realized we were going to face a big problem: the lack of information in English. Information about shelter, water supply, etc. was updated very quickly but in Japanese only… and here is where the network we have created in KUMISA became central among the international students during the following weeks. Some of us who can understand Japanese were looking for information, translating and communicating it to the group as soon as we could. Some of us had the chance to leave Kumamoto for a while, and I personally felt kind of guilty for leaving friends and the Kumamoto people behind. But then I realized that I could be more helpful by passing on all the information I could get. Weeks later, someone randomly said to me: “Thank you for keeping us informed”…

When you are alone in a foreign country, it is so comforting to know that you can count on others in good times and mostly during the hard times. And I’m glad that KUMISA became that help for many.
KEEP conducted an interview in January 2017 with Quadratullah Zwak, Vice-President of the Kumamoto Islamic Center (KIC) and President of the Afghani community, allowing him to share his personal experience and that of the Muslim community in Kumamoto.

**Did KIC serve as a shelter in Kumamoto city during the earthquakes?**

Yes. After the first earthquake the Muslims living nearby the KIC came to the center and used it as a shelter. The people didn’t know about the earthquake, but they heard from some news that aftershocks will happen. They stayed at the center but at that time, all the things were normal: food, water, everything was available.

After the second earthquake on the 16th of April, most of the Muslims living in Kumamoto came to the KIC and used it as a shelter. Two days after the earthquake the KIC started to receive donations from many cities within Japan by many Muslim associations, embassies, and Japanese associations. The very first donation came from the Indonesian Embassy and then from Muslim Associations in Fukuoka, Miyazaki, Hokkaido, Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka and some other cities. KIC became a focal point, collecting the donations.

We then distributed the donations in two ways. Firstly, we helped the people who were living nearby since they came by themselves and we provided what they needed. Secondly, since some Muslims in Kumamoto are businessmen and have cars and other facilities, we requested them to help us. They happily accepted our request and we provided and delivered foods to the homes of the people affected by the earthquake. After the second earthquake KIC members worked in two teams, the first team was responsible for receiving donations from outside of Kumamoto and the second one was to distribute the donations to Mashiki and other affected villages/residential areas located around the epicenter of the earthquake.

The most important thing was that, after the second earthquake, water was cut off in most places, even for drinking. But in KIC, we had water, not only for
drinking but also for taking a bath (shower) because we have our own water well. Therefore, many people donated big plastic bottles and we filled these bottles with water and distributed them. It was really helpful to people who had no water. KIC is a three-storey building and the first floor was used as a store for collecting the donations. Mostly, people who used the KIC as a shelter are Muslims and but there were no restrictions for non-Muslims and anybody could come.

**Was there any damage to the KIC by the earthquakes?**

Yes. Most of the students from Afghanistan are civil engineering students so we know the damage done by the earthquake and the risk that the building posed. So we advised the people to stay on the first floor. There were some cracks in the second and third floor partitions but we knew that these cracks were not very dangerous as long as the main structure was safe.

**How many people took shelter at Kumamoto Islamic Center?**

It was difficult to count because the number changed from day to day. We have enough places for a hundred people but the hall was mostly occupied with donations, I guess there were around 30 people who took shelter at KIC.

**How many days did KIC open as a shelter?**

KIC was open for everybody who needed help. After the government’s announcement that there were no longer any risks and that electricity and water supply were back in service, most of the people went back to their homes. Altogether, KIC acted as a shelter from April 15 to May 10.

**From your personal experience, what were people’s mental states at the time of the earthquakes?**

As you know, most of the foreigners haven’t experienced such a big earthquake and it was scary. My friend and I were outside in a shopping center when the first earthquake happened. I called my wife and family immediately and they said they were OK. I called some of them and we gathered at the football ground at the north campus of Kumamoto University. At that time, we were 4-5 families all together and the weather was a bit cold. For the sake of the women and children, since my house was very close to the football ground, I brought my mattress, blankets and pillows to the ground and prepared a good place for them. Also for the men it was a terrible night. We could not sleep as
the ground was shaking all night.

On the second day, we went to Junior High School (Sakuraiyama) near the university and stayed there at night when the second earthquake happened. Although KIC was a shelter at that time, KIC did not have separate room for men and women. That’s why we went there to take shelter. When the second earthquake happened, we came to the ground and I went back to KIC to check the centre and the people. The people were really afraid and they came out of the centre and just stayed in the nearby small park.

Some people decided to go out of Kumamoto and some people decided to stay in Kumamoto to help other people. This was my personal experience.

**How was your experience at the shelter?**

Actually, one of my daughters has been sick for a long time. She has a heart disease and she needs oxygen continuously. So after the second earthquake, JICA, which funded the scholarship of most of the Afghan students, arranged to evacuate them to Kitakyushu. But I am not a JICA scholarship student, this is why I went to the Kumamoto University gym for shelter the next day. Fortunately, at the gym I found my supervisor and my friends. They were helping other people. But the problem was my daughter needed oxygen. At home, we use an electrical machine to supply oxygen for my daughter but when we go out we use mobile oxygen bottles. One bottle supplies oxygen for 5 hours. At that time, I had only 2-3 hours of oxygen left and after that the oxygen supply would run out. When I found my supervisor, I told him about this and asked for help. He then called the company and they brought a big bottle which could supply oxygen for 24 hours. Then my sensei suggested bringing the electrical oxygen machine to the gym. At that time I was really happy that they (the university staff) provided everything, even hot water for making milk from condensed milk powder for the children. They provided everything for the families. It was a really good experience and I found how much Japanese people helped other people. Even under hard conditions like this, they still helped other people. It was a very good experience to see those good people.

After that, I was also transferred to Kitakyushu by JICA as I studied for my Masters degree with a JICA scholarship. But I had a responsibility towards KIC and also my family. I stayed there, then I also went to Fukuoka to see the people who had moved from Kumamoto. Then I made the list of people who were evacuated to Fukuoka and Kitakyushu.
Actually, for the people who are holding leadership positions, even if they feel very frightened or worried, they should hide their feelings sometimes. For my case, I also hid my feelings. I felt sorry but I lied to my people that I was not afraid but actually it was terrible.

Moreover, as a civil engineer, we know that the buildings here were built to withstand the earthquake with a magnitude as strong as 7. The second earthquake measured over 7. You know if another earthquake measuring more than 7 would happen again, it meant that all the buildings would collapse. What we need to do is to make ourselves ready. Earthquakes are like an unwelcome guest. We need to prepare ourselves and this is very important. We can’t stop an earthquake but how we face that disaster is important. I think everyone of us should have a plan of how to mitigate the risks at the time of an earthquake.

As a foreigner, what was the most difficult thing during that experience?

I had many responsibilities for my family and also for KIC and the people in our community. All these responsibilities were placed on my shoulders and at that time, I forgot about myself totally. But the good thing is the people who were in touch with me, the Japanese people who can speak English, they were really helpful. They called me many times, like my sensei, they asked me how I was and they guided me. As stated concerning my daughter, there was only three hours supply of oxygen left, but as soon as my sensei knew about this, he called the company. Actually the company was closed at that time because of the earthquake. I don’t know how he arranged these things but about half an hour after telling him, he told me that I would receive a very big bottle of oxygen. It was very good news for me because there was only 3 hours supply of oxygen left for my daughter. I don’t know what would have happened if the oxygen had finished and no additional supply had come. We received a very large bottle within an hour.

In addition, we constantly received alerts and messages on our phones. But they were all written in Japanese. I think they should be translated to English (at least) which will be a big help to foreigners. At least to the phones of foreigners, I think it is easy for the service providers to identify foreigners’ numbers and provide the translated messages in times of emergency.

Like I said, we cannot prevent the disaster from happening but it is very important to know how to mitigate the risks. The first thing is to give awareness of the situation, information like this is the first thing that the people need.
during times of disaster. The alert messages should be written in simple Japanese or in English. In times of disaster, a short and simple text would be very helpful. Kumamoto University also sent us information to our emails but to access our email, we need internet and there was no internet for some of us during the earthquake. So I think, short text messages to our phones in the time of emergency would help the foreigners a lot.

**How many months did it take for you to get used to the aftershocks?**

Until now, I advised my friends to be prepared all the time. I heard from many people that their phone battery was dying during the emergency. I advise that if you are at home, keep your phone plugged in and charged.

KIC was always in touch with Kumamoto International Foundation (KIF) to discuss the distribution of our donations and food. Together with KIF, KIC has helped the people a lot in sharing food and providing shelter during the time of the earthquake. We have done many projects and events together with KIF. In addition, the people who had cars helped us very much at that time because without this, our donation would just be for the people around our place, Kurokami area. But with their help in transportation, we could distribute the foods and supplies anywhere. People who took shelter at KIC also volunteered to help distribute the donations to other people. We were really organized, we made a schedule and put the names up for participant’s duties.

In addition to that, we, KIC members, joined the Kumamoto University’s call for volunteers to help to build temporary shelters in Mashiki town, which suffered a lot of damage. There was one big gym in Mashiki town where we went to help them build the partitions for temporary shelters. Actually, my sensei was responsible for this work and he is still working on Mashiki town’s data. I am also working on the city planning of Mashiki Town.

**What do you want to suggest to our project?**

This type of project will reduce the risk of the people and show the people what they should do to overcome such terrible situations. I hope that in the future foreigners will learn from our experiences for mitigating earthquake risks and make right decisions during natural disasters.
Kumamoto City International Center was established as a shelter for evacuees from the Kumamoto earthquakes at 1:00am on Friday, 15th April after the first M6.5 earthquake struck at 9:26pm on Thursday 14th April. Three Korean and one Japanese residents evacuated to KIF until the evening, and we closed the shelter at 10:00pm, as no one anticipated another one of M7.3 to follow after midnight the next day. Again, we opened the shelter here at 4:00am soon after the earthquake, and organized it continuously, 24 hours a day, until 30th April. Around 150 evacuees, including thirty-eight foreign residents, spent uneasy days here at the peak.

Simultaneously, we set up Disaster Relief - Multilingual and Multicultural Support Center on 20th April, where many supporters from all over Kyushu and the other area came to help foreign victims of the earthquake by translating disaster relief information from Kumamoto city etc., useful for foreign residents, to English, Chinese and Korean. Also, patrols to each shelter were made to calm down possible fears of foreign evacuees.

Through the relief activities in talking with many foreign evacuees of the Kumamoto earthquakes, I could see further hopes in the super powerful volunteer spirits the foreign and Japanese residents performed to help each other. I heard the following words from many foreign residents:

“We were so surprised at and could not find any suitable words to express our gratitude to our Japanese neighbors who helped us, even though their situation looked more serious due to their damaged houses, properties and so on.”

“We are so glad that Japanese neighbors always said to us DAIJYOBU(OK)! when we meet on the streets”

I saw many foreign residents’ communities such as
international students, Muslim, Filipino etc. administrate some shelters to help the evacuees, distribute relief goods to the victims, and set up soup ovens to the victims. Then, even in the terrible situations, the good connections of human beings gave further hopes for developing our society so that no one is left behind.

Now I would like again to emphasize that we must make every effort to be partners, to need each other beyond any difference of languages, cultures, customs etc. It is our responsibility to hand over rich and sustainable societies to the next generation. These sort of collaborations will be of great help in case of any disaster!

Thanks.
Hiromitsu YAGI,
Secretary-General
Kumamoto International Foundation
On the 4th of February, a joint workshop was held at the Kumamoto International Foundation between members of the Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project (KEEP), Kumamoto International Foundation (KIF), and students of Yatsushiro High School. This was a collaborative workshop to exchange ideas and experiences regarding foreigners’ experience during the earthquake that happened in Kumamoto on the 14th and 16th of April, 2016. As part of the workshop, members of KEEP were asked to share their experiences with students of Yatsushiro High School. The students were then able to see the different problems faced by foreigners and how they were able to deal with them.

The main part of the workshop involved a roundtable discussion between members of KEEP and the students regarding foreigners’ experience during the earthquake in Kumamoto. This was a great chance for the students to listen, understand, and learn about the different problems that foreigners had to go through and how they were able to overcome them. The students were given the chance to ask different questions to different members of KEEP about some of the problems that they personally experienced during the earthquake. Members of KEEP were also given the chance to ask a few questions to the students regarding their experiences. These discussions between the students and members of KEEP were interesting and enlightening. It allowed foreign and Japanese students to exchange different experiences, ideas on some of the main problems faced by foreigners during the earthquakes, and discuss how people can work together during these situations.

At the end of the workshop, the students were then separated into three groups and asked to come up with a proposal on the best solution to help foreigners during an earthquake. The members of KEEP would judge and pick out the best one of the three groups. The three groups came up with three different solutions. Firstly, signs with easy illustrations for foreigners to read during an earthquake. Secondly, leaflets to be placed or given out to foreigners at important entry points into Japan like at airports, and lastly for Japanese and foreigners to attend disaster prevention drills. Out of the five members of
KEEP, one chose the first proposal, another one chose the second proposal while the remaining three members chose the third proposal. The third proposal was preferred over the others because it was more practical and hands-on experience. This has so far been one of the major problems faced by foreigners during the earthquake, which was not knowing what to do or how to react.

To conclude, all of the participants of the workshop were able to share and exchange their ideas and experiences about the earthquake. Through this, the students were able to understand the difficulties faced by the foreign community within Kumamoto. Such opportunities to share and exchange important and interesting ideas in events like this make it easier for people living in multicultural and multi-diverse areas such as Kumamoto to coexist and live cooperatively.
On the 21st of January, 2016, Kumamoto University held a public policy poster competition where students from the university were tasked to create and present a poster on the different projects that they had been working on. A total of seven groups participated in the poster competition including KEEP, which was the only group consisting of foreign students. Unlike the other six presentations, KEEP’s presentation was done by each of its members. They presented on the areas they had worked on and some of the findings that they had acquired regarding the foreigners experience during the earthquake that occurred in Kumamoto on the 14th and 16th of April, 2016.

The poster competition was a great chance for KEEP to present its work which it had been doing and some of the findings it had gathered. However, what was beneficial and helpful to KEEP was that during the poster competition, it allowed us to share our work and findings with other like minded students, professors and outsiders who also had an interest in the project. Furthermore, through visiting and talking with other groups about their projects, we were able to learn from these different groups to improve our own project.
and in addition help to create a good and healthy relationship and network with other like minded participants. At the end of the poster presentation, prizes were awarded to different groups. KEEP was awarded a prize from Kumanichi newspaper for giving a voice to the concerns of foreign residents living in Kumamoto. Foreign residents make up a small portion of the population in Kumamoto; it is still important however for the voice of this group to be heard so that no one is left out. This comes to light especially during natural disasters like the earthquake and this is one of KEEP’s focuses. Formal recognition and an article about KEEP in the Kumanichi newspaper has had a positive effect on all the members.

We hope to build and continue on with KEEP based on the work, findings and recognition that we have received so far. We aim to continue to help share these findings of foreigners’ experiences during the earthquake to other foreign residents, Japanese, media and others within Kumamoto and Japan to help foster an understanding and cooperation within a multicultural society.
Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project (KEEP)

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INTRODUCTION

- In April 2016, Kumamoto Prefecture in Southern Japan, suffered two strong earthquakes of an intensity seven on the Richter earthquake of 2015. Many foreign students found their lives tough, especially when could not speak Japanese and struggled to get help and information.
- Written in English, to spread and spread the message of those who experienced the earthquake to people across the world in English, Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project (KEEP) was started in May 2016 with the support of Kumamoto University.

Personal Experience Essays

- Personal experience essays, an essay that describes what happened during the earthquake.
- The essays are written in English and are available on the project's webpage.

Video Interviews and Questionnaires

- KEEP (Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project) surveys 30 people by questionnaire. The four questions asked of the participants vary slightly, depending on the earthquake's intensity, the help they received, their experiences, and their perspective on how they can help people and prevent some of the structural failures during the earthquake.

Grand Challenge Kumamoto Workshop

- On July 3, 2016, we had the Grand Challenge Kumamoto workshop.
- Students, people from the international community, and Japanese attended the workshop.
- All shared their experiences and exchanged ideas for improving responses during emergencies.
- KEEP covered the workshop and created a website with materials.

Social Media and Webpage of KEEP

- KEEP Facebook page is a social platform which is an innovative way of sharing information and activities of the project.
- The page also represents experiences from around the world.

Future Activities

- We are planning to invite an international visit to Japan in March 2017. The visit will consist of all information about Kumamoto earthquakes, the experiences of the international community, and the lessons from the survey.
- This will help reduce the data for the international community in terms of a natural disaster in the future.

Workshop - after the break of the conference, we will hold a workshop in April 2017 in order to communicate the 1st anniversary of the Kumamoto earthquakes.

Additional survey and analysis of the future activity will be included in the second workshop. We will share this information with KEEP and in a symposium in February 2017 (in cooperation with Kumamoto International Foundation).
AFTERMATH OF THE EARTHQUAKES
(Kumamoto Castle, late April 2016)
AFTERMATH OF THE EARTHQUAKES
(Mashiki Town, November 2016)
The logo of KEEP reflects the ambition of our project, which is to embrace our beloved Kumamoto with the collaborative efforts of Japanese and international residents. The Kumamoto castle in the middle represents Kumamoto. The downward looking eyes of the castle represent the chaos and suffering of Kumamoto, which was caused by the devastating earthquakes in April 2016. The meaning of the two arms embracing the castle is that we are all helping to rebuild Kumamoto. The arms are drawn in different colours as they represent the local Japanese people and the international community. Hand in hand, we will all keep Kumamoto strong and become one family, represented by the shape of a heart.
The Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project is one that all members wish to keep going, in order to spread the message of those who experienced the earthquakes and try to use this message to positively impact Japan.

Information about KEEP can be found online, on Facebook and on WordPress. Our Facebook page contains details about our upcoming events, pictures, and general information about KEEP. Our WordPress page is home to the essays that those affected by the earthquakes have submitted, as well as information about the research, conference, and presentation activities we continue to take part in.

If you would like to know more about our project, please visit our pages at

facebook.com/kumadaiquake
kumadaiquake.wordpress.com

If you would contact KEEP, please either contact us through one of our pages, or email us directly at

kumadaiquake@gmail.com
Whilst KEEP is a student led initiative, the project could not have come this far without the help of many people. First of all we would like to thank all the people, both Japanese and foreign, who took their time to share their earthquake experience with us. Not only will KEEP continue to spread their words for others to hear, we will use their experiences in order to help influence Japanese society for the better.

Special thanks go to Professor Shinya Ueno of the public policy department, Kumamoto University. He not only helped us get started with this project but has also provided invaluable support to us throughout our journey.

We would also like to thank the Kumamoto University international students office for their support in helping us find a publisher for our work, and student support for allocating funding to us to enable us to create this booklet.

Thanks to Morita san at Hope Publishing who helped us a lot with the design and layout of this booklet.

Hiromitsu Yagi from Kumamoto International Foundation has also offered us much assistance in shaping our project, creating this booklet, and allowing KEEP to spread the message of the foreign residents to the Japanese.

Again, we thank everybody who has contributed to KEEP and hope that we can continue to keep the voice of the foreign residents heard and have a positive impact on Japan for all.

Let’s KEEP together!
Executive Members

Andrew Mitchell (UK): President
Andrew has lived in Japan for four years and in Kumamoto since April 2014. He is currently studying in the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Sciences as a Ph.D. candidate. His research looks into the impact of the Fukushima disaster on Japanese politics, in particular nuclear policy.

Khine Zar Wynn Myint (Myanmar): Vice-President
Khine has lived in Kumamoto since April 2015 and she is a Ph.D. candidate in Pharmaceutical Science for the HIGO programme (Health Life Science: Interdisciplinary and Glocal Oriented). Her current research is the exploration of bioactive chemical compounds from Myanmar Medicinal Plants.

Francis Wargirai (Papua New Guinea): Head of Media
Francis Wargirai has lived in Kumamoto for three years. He is currently studying in the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Sciences, majoring in Public Policy. He is currently looking at Local Governments in Papua New Guinea and how they have historically evolved over time and how this has ultimately affected their performance.

Russel Yangin (Papua New Guinea): Head of Analysis
Russel Yangin has lived in Japan for almost two years since 2015. He is currently studying a Master Program in Public Policy Studies in the School of Social and Cultural Science at Kumamoto University. His research is into the impact of Neoliberal approach on the delivery of government social services.

Kaung Kyaw (Myanmar): Head of Design
Kaung came to Kumamoto in April 2015 and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Applied Chemistry and Biochemistry, Kumamoto University. He is studying the antimicrobial effects of silver nanoparticles aiming towards the development of silver-based antimicrobial agents.
The Kumamoto Earthquake Experience Project (KEEP) was started by graduate students at Kumamoto University, so that people could share their experiences from the Kumamoto earthquakes which occurred in April 2016. Initially envisaged as a one-off workshop, the response was so overwhelmingly positive that the project was expanded to include focus groups, further workshops, and also this booklet, in order to give a voice to those affected.

Within this booklet is information about the Kumamoto earthquakes and about KEEP, essays from students affected by the earthquakes, information about KEEP’s findings, photographs showing the aftermath of the earthquakes, and contributions from organisations in Kumamoto describing the way in which they responded to the needs of both the Japanese and foreign community.

Let’s KEEP together!