

< PLEA TO PARTICIPATE > BY MITSUKO SHIMOMURA

LET US JOIN HANDS TOGETHER ON THE AFFECTED 500KM AND PRAY!

-HUMANBAND on Route 3.11 Fukushima -

It is soon the one year anniversary of the Great Eastern Japanese Earthquake of March 11th, 2011. After one year, the affected areas' wounds are far from being healed. Fukushima, especially, unlike the other prefectures has to bear the painful uncertainty of when the nuclear accident and contamination will come to an end. This weighs heavily on everyone living in Fukushima. At "Mitsuko Shimomura's Ikikata Jyuku" we decided to be a part of the "HUMANBAND on ROUTE 3.11" project and are calling for people to gather to Fukushima on March 11th(Sunday) at Sunrise (5:50 AM) .

"HUMANBAND on Route 3.11" project is an unprecedented project where on this day, participants will join hand and hand together on the route of over 500km (or more), where the disaster struck, from the prefectures of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima and Ibaragi. We will form a line, as close as possibly to the coastline that was affected and firmly join hand in hand and face the sunrise. Depending on the route, we will need to gather 600,000 to one million people. And at sunrise, everyone will offer a silent prayer for 33 seconds (3x11), to pray for the deceased, the victims, and also pray for the gratitude that we are alive, and that we will not waste any precious lives that have been lost, and promise that "this land" and "Tohoku" will revive. After the prayer we will sing together the song "Furusato" – a song known to all Japanese about the love for their homeland – followed by each participant planting a seed of a flower to create a trail of optimism. Furthermore, this will be photographed by around 50,000 volunteer photographers (amateur and professional), and later connect into one photograph: the world's largest commemorative photograph. We plan to make a DVD as well. There will be no speech nor a call out. This is a simple and quiet "prayer, gratitude, and a promise for revival." But this will be a powerful

message we send, not only nationwide but to the world. This is the “heart and soul” core of this project. It is one doctor, Dr Masaki Kamei, one of the endorser and supporter of “Mitsuko Shimomura’s Ikikata Jyuku”, who founded this project; a project unprecedented that many think impossible. However this project is spreading. I am drawn by people who are strongly devoted to seemingly impossible (with no merits) missions, so I right away felt a strong connection and decided to take charge of the Fukushima part, together with the pupils of the two schools that I founded last year: “Mitsuko Shimomura’s Ikikata Jyuku” and “Seiwa Jyuku Fukushima” – the pupils who have been touched and impressed by the devotion and passion to this project.

Though “dreams and ambition” can be large, there is limited time. We do not have the capacity to cover the other prefectures. Thus we will focus all of our energy to Fukushima. As you all know, Fukushima has suffered not only the natural disasters of earthquake and tsunami but has suffered a so-called “man-made disaster” of the nuclear accident and nuclear contamination. The nuclear aspect makes the revival of Fukushima ever so complicated. The people of Fukushima are bearing humanity’s responsibility. In this sense, Fukushima is symbolic place in addition to being the victim of the triple disasters. Thus there is also a symbolic aspect that we call out “Please gather to Fukushima!”

Many have asked “We would like to do something for Fukushima. Is there anything we can help with?” However obstacles such as work prevent a long-term volunteer donating to the Red Cross does not give one a sense of helping, or some think going to Fukushima may even bother the locals. We heard many with these concerns. If any of you share even a little bit of these thoughts, please participate to this “HUMANBAND”.

At the moment the route is planned to be on the attached map. There are several areas that are prohibited along the coast. We are right now confirming the route on foot, but it

will not change dramatically. There will be a 1000 yen fee. This will cover the miscellaneous fees such as temporary bathrooms, placements of guards, communication, printed materials among others. Please see the website: <http://ikikata-jyuku.com/humanband/index.html> for how to make a payment.

By coincidence, March 11 falls on a Sunday. The sunrise will be at 5:50am in Fukushima, where we will be holding hands and praying. Not many will have work on a Sunday at the time of the sunrise. It will take about two hours. To come to Fukushima at this hour, that alone will give so much strength, encouragement and a positive energy to Fukushima as well as to the other affected areas. I am certain that by this act and spirit of giving, by participating to this project, each will in return experience the gift of joy, passion and wellbeing by meeting and being with like-minded people.

Immediately after the disaster, I, myself went to Fukushima several times with a 10 ton truck to deliver relief goods to the evacuees of the nuclear accident and also to evacuation shelters. The evacuees told me "The donations of money and goods are extremely appreciated. But the best support was the fact that people came to Fukushima." I will never forget that I heard this over and over. Japanese people forget easily. Immediately after the crisis everyone in Japan and around the world's attention was on Fukushima. However with time, it is being forgotten. But to fight against the nuclear accident and contamination, it will be a very long battle for the many that live in Fukushima. To participate in this "HUMANBAND on Route 3.11" is a big emotional support for Fukushima. It conveys a message "We have not forgotten about you." "HUMANBAND" is not just a one-off project. Every year on March 11th, we plan to conduct this project. For this one year anniversary, to be honest, no one can predict how many will participate and the length that connect the route. But we must call out to as many people as possible. Even if we are not able to connect all 6 prefecture that were affected, every year, we hope that this "HUMANBAND" will

grow, and for Fukushima that we will be able to get closer to the coast for the full route. This is our objective.

We aim that “HUMANBAND on Route 3.11” will progressively become a modern day “Okuno Hosomichi” – the historical narrow road of the North – and be a source of tourism in the future. We also aim at perhaps starting a foundation to support the Tohoku region with the money left over from the 1000 yen participation fee. We have many goals and ambitions. But for these goals to materialize, it will depend on how many will come to Fukushima (or to other affected prefectures), hold hands, and how long of a “human connection” we can make.

For those who are interested, please fill out the entry form at the website: <http://ikikata-jyuku.com/humanband/index.html> and express your desire to join. Questions such as “Where will I be standing? Where do we meet? How do I get there? Where do I stay the night before?” These details will all depend on how many will participate. Thus please do fill in the form so we have a good idea of the number of participants. We welcome, of course people from Fukushima, but anywhere from Japan or even from other countries. Please participate! We welcome this with open arms. Even if you cannot participate, please help in spreading this call out to as many of your acquaintances and friends, so that we can gather as many people as possible. This alone will be a great support. For those who will participate, we will be sending details and information by e-mail. Of course, if you are unable to attend, please let us know and we will understand.

It has been a long letter of plea, but I hope that many of you will understand and relate to this project so as to create a landmark in Fukushima history. I look forward to seeing you in Fukushima.

Mitsuko Shimomura