

# Messages for LIGHT UP NIPPON

In commemoration of the first anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, in March of 2012 The Japan Foundation is pleased to host a website for a limited time that will collect messages of encouragement and fireworks illustrations created by an online drawing tool from all over the world for the residents of the Tohoku region. On the website, your personally designed virtual fireworks will be launched according to the time zone of your submission. We are able to accept messages in many different languages, so please submit your entry today. (Submissions will be accepted up until March 31, 2012.)

[messagesforlightupnippon.jp/en/](http://messagesforlightupnippon.jp/en/)



# LIGHT UP NIPPON DOCUMENTARY

The Japan Foundation  
4-4-1 Yotsuya, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0004, Japan  
<http://www.jpf.go.jp/>

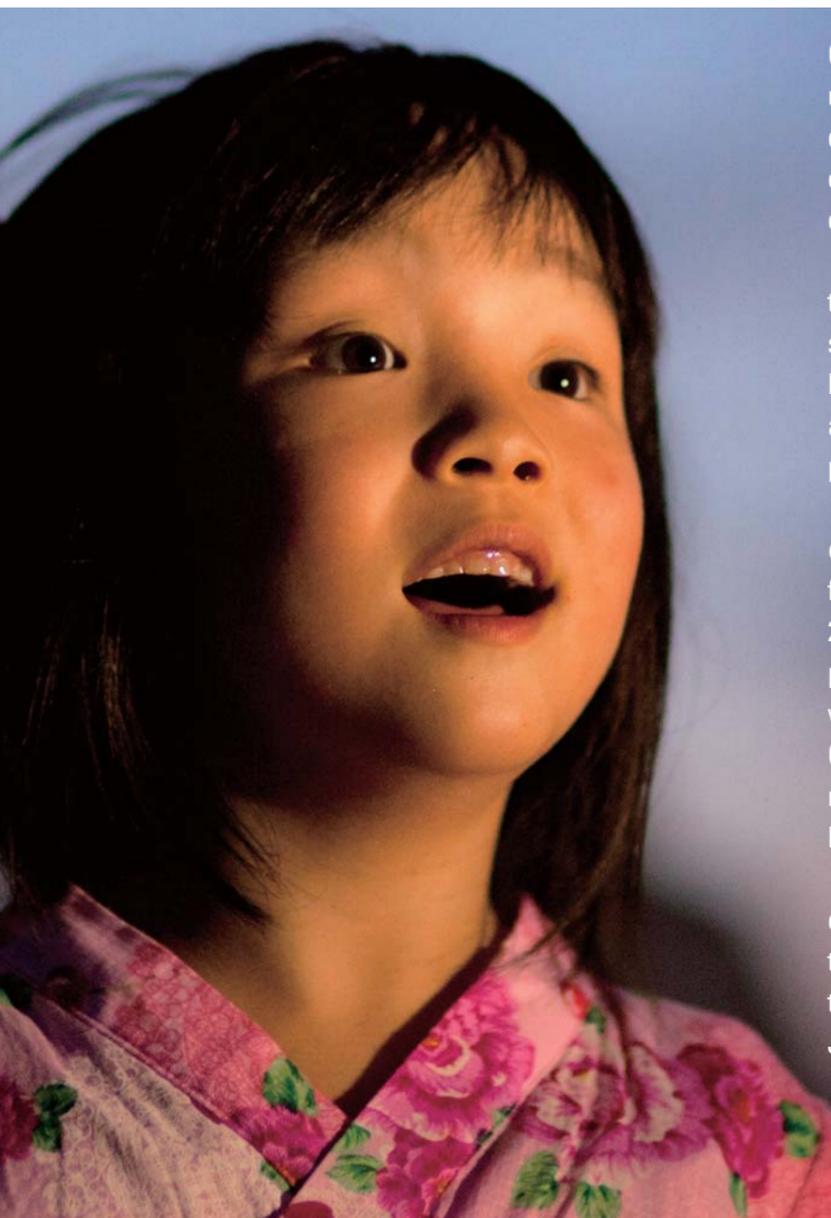
  
JAPAN FOUNDATION 国際交流基金





# “LIGHT UP NIPPON”

— Recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake



On March 11, 2011, Japan was hit by an unprecedented earthquake and tsunami that caused devastating damage, bringing sorrow and hardship not only to the Tohoku region but also to the entire nation of Japan.

LIGHT UP NIPPON is a fireworks display project that launched fireworks at 10 disaster-stricken areas simultaneously following the Great East Japan Earthquake. Traditionally, fireworks in Japan serve as a memorial to the victims and a symbol of hope and prayers for relief and recovery.

After overcoming many obstacles with strong commitment and sheer determination, the first fireworks event of this project took place on August 11, 2011, much to the delight and excitement of many people. This was made possible through the joint volunteer efforts of the LIGHT UP NIPPON Executive Committee comprised of local people from the respective disaster-stricken areas and young businesspeople from various organizations in Tokyo.

The Japan Foundation has produced a documentary video for overseas viewing that includes the LIGHT UP NIPPON project, an effort made possible through the combined power of individuals from Japan’s younger generation.

## Japan and Fireworks

Like many countries, Japan celebrates special occasions with fireworks, but it also has long held the belief that fireworks repose the spirits of the deceased and ward off bad luck.

It is thought that gunpowder first made its way to Japan from Europe in the 16th century. In the beginning, it was used for military firearms and to make smoke signals. Fireworks were developed for display purposes in the Edo Period, and the roots of fireworks festivals date back to 1733. In the year prior to this, many people died of famine and plague, so fireworks were set off to commemorate the dead and drive away

disease. Around this time, specialist pyrotechnicians first came on the scene and competition arose to see who could create the biggest, most beautiful fireworks. The technology and artistic quality of fireworks continue to evolve to this day, and Japan’s fireworks are world-renowned for their sophistication.

In Japan, people observe a custom known as *Obon* in which the spirits of deceased family members and ancestors are welcomed back home once a year. A small bonfire is lit at the home entrance to guide the spirits back. A bonfire is also lit when the spirits are believed to be returning to the spirit world (the most

famous bonfire called *Daimonji* is in Kyoto). Typical traditions observed during the *Obon* season in different parts of Japan include releasing floating lanterns, to which one’s wishes and the names of deceased loved ones are attached, into a river or the sea; dances known as *bon-odori* that include people wearing *yukata* (summer kimono) dancing in rings several layers wide; and large fireworks displays. The fireworks are not only beautiful and dynamic but are also considered to be special in Japan for helping people to mourn the dead and reunite with family and friends in their hometowns.



How did Mr. Yoshitake Takada, the founder of LIGHT UP NIPPON, come up with the idea of holding fireworks displays in the Tohoku region?

It all started when Mr. Takada had heard the news that fireworks events had been cancelled throughout Tokyo. Acting on impulse, he immediately went to fireworks manufacturers to find out about the circumstances. “What about bringing the fireworks were not used in Tokyo to Tohoku?” he wondered. Thereafter, LIGHT UP NIPPON was born.

In April, soon after the earthquake, Mr. Takada headed for the disaster-stricken areas in Tohoku. Without having any prior appointment, he tried to explain his idea to local government officials, who were understandably overwhelmed and unable to be enthusiastic about what he had to say.

Mr. Takada was at a loss and went to Otsuchi Town in Iwate Prefecture where he had spent his graduate school years. The town, however, had been engulfed by the tsunami as well. While there, he had a chance to meet his dorm mother during his graduate school days, who broke down in tears. She introduced him to a leader of an evacuation center, who responded positively to possibly holding a fireworks show in Otsuchi Town.

While the young businesspeople who volunteered from Tokyo were enthusiastic about the LIGHT UP NIPPON fireworks project, it was necessary to build relationships with those devastated by the disaster. They traveled to local towns in the Tohoku region every week to talk with individuals there, and take into consideration the sentiments of the local people above all when planning the event. As a result, the LIGHT UP NIPPON project gained approval and cooperation from many people in various municipalities, and subsequently, 11 locations were secured for fireworks shows.

As the number of locations increased, more funds were needed, and the Tokyo members scrambled to find corporate sponsors every day—all for the sake of the Tohoku region, the recovery of local areas and the hope that the fireworks would bring a smile to those who saw them. Every member of the Tohoku Executive Committee and the organizers from Tokyo never gave up or gave in to the many obstacles they faced, and over time, a corps of volunteers came together.

This documentary film follows the entire process from the start through to August 11, 2011, when fireworks filled the skies.

28 minutes, Japanese  
(with English/French/German/Russian/Arabic/Chinese/Korean/Portuguese/Spanish narration and subtitles)  
Director: Kensaku Kakimoto  
Producer: Atsuki Yukawa  
Starring Yoshitake Takada, Atsuki Yukawa, members of the LIGHT UP NIPPON Executive Committee and all participant members at each fireworks launch site  
Production and Copyright: The Japan Foundation