



Japan's ambassador thanks Canadians for aid

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MONTREAL — Japan's ambassador to Canada thanked Canadians on Thursday for the millions they've donated to help his devastated homeland.

Kaoru Ishikawa's country faces a nuclear crisis following a massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami that wiped out towns and killed thousands.

"I want to thank Canadians deeply," Ishikawa told a business luncheon in Montreal.

"We are so grateful indeed."

The ambassador predicted that Japan will overcome the imposing economic hurdles, such as rebuilding highways, railroads and ports.

But he fears that terrifying images of the twin catastrophes will live on for decades in the memories of Japanese children.

"We can easily imagine what they saw," Ishikawa said.

"The tragedy is on the human dimension."

Last week's disasters are believed to have killed more than 10,000 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless.

Emergency workers worked frantically Thursday to regain control of Japan's dangerously overheated nuclear complex, as risks of radiation exposure remained high.

Canadians have responded by taking out their chequebooks.

By Thursday afternoon, the Canadian Red Cross alone had received \$7.7 million from individual and corporate donors.

A Red Cross spokeswoman said the money will help fund evacuations, medical care and the distribution of emergency goods like food, water and shelters.

"There's still quite a bit of need -- they're still very much in the acute phase of the disaster," Pam Aung Thin said.

The Canadian government has offered a 17-member Disaster Victim Identification team as well as technical expertise and equipment to help Japan stabilize its nuclear reactors.

Ottawa has also shipped 25,000 thermal blankets, which Ishikawa said are needed as survivors struggle to deal with frigid temperatures in the hardest-hit areas of Japan.

In the aftermath of last year's Haitian earthquake, Canadians also opened their wallets.

The federal government matched individual donations from citizens to help the Caribbean nation through the disaster.

A spokeswoman for the Foreign Affairs Department said Thursday that there are no immediate government plans to make the same pledge for Japan.

"A matching fund has not been established for the Japan earthquake," Claude Rochon wrote in an email.

"As the prime minister has stated, Canada stands ready to provide any and all support to the people of Japan."

Aung Thin said it's difficult to compare the Japanese emergency with the Haitian one.

"They're two different contexts -- one is very much a developing nation, the other one is a highly developed society that is part of the G8," Aung Thin said.

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