

Memorial speech – Lars Løkke Rasmussen

A year ago, the world was rendered speechless by the catastrophe that hit the shores of Japan. A tsunami hit the shores with such a power that whole cities - and those who lived there - were washed away.

When it happened, I was at a meeting in the European Council discussing the situation in Libya, among other things. I remember getting the news and how the atmosphere instantly changed.

I watched the massive wave sweeping across the land and destroying everything in its way. And I remember thinking that the madness in Libya – however meaningless – at least had someone to hold accountable. That someone was responsible for the suffering and could be brought to justice.

No one can be held responsible for the injustice of nature that hit Japan a year ago. There can be no trial and no punishment – only thoughts and words of remembrance. No words can lessen the sorrow and grief of those left behind but we gather here today because words are all we have to express feelings of loss and of compassion.

A year ago, the course of thousands of lives – and the course of a nation - was brutally changed. And even though every life lost is a tragedy, we are also reminded that the resilience of mankind – even against the violent forces of nature – is close to limitless.

Not long ago, a Danish newspaper showed images of various locations in Japan shortly after the tsunami hit and how they are today. And while the images of the earthquake's and tsunami's initial destruction gave way for feelings despair, the newer images of reconstruction also inspired feelings of hope and optimism.

Faced with the unbearable hardship that nature can bestow upon us, thousands stepped up and did what they could to ease the suffering, help those in need and rebuild what could be reconstructed. It is with good reason that compassion and a profound will to help each other have become hallmarks of the Japanese people during this time of crisis.

That is why this solemn occasion of remembrance of those lost, should also be a remembrance of those who were left behind and contributed to restoring the possibility of an every-day life even after disaster struck. The organized and speedy rebuilding – to which both states and foreign citizens have contributed – is a testament to the awesome power that humanity yields when united. And for that the Japanese people and state deserve our gratitude.

Japan has reminded us all that even in the darkest of hours there is always a flicker of hope. That even though life is sometimes reduced to cruel

randomness, cooperation and compassion are almost always enough to overcome the seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

I am confident that Japan will both recover and remember. Recover from the material damages and remember the lost ones – and while Japan does so, it will be a testimony to the strength and unbreakable spirit of the Japanese people, who – sadly – are no strangers to tragedy.

The disaster that struck a year ago will continue to be in our hearts and minds for a long time. And so will the compassion and unbendable will of the Japanese people.

Thank you for inviting me to speak on this occasion and thank you for your time.