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Red Cross labels Fukushima evacuations humanitarian crisis

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By HIROYUKI MAEGAWA/ Correspondent

GENEVA--Last year's nuclear disaster is an ongoing "humanitarian crisis," according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which released its World Disasters Report 2012 on Oct. 16.

The report, subtitled "Focus on forced migration and displacement," described the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant as a technological disaster leading to the "evacuation and resettlement of affected communities."

The report included the Fukushima crisis in a chapter dealing with the estimated 15 million people who are displaced each year by development projects, many of them in developing countries.

The report quoted an evacuee from an exclusion zone within a 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima plant as saying: "We followed the authorities' instructions and ended up somewhere where the radioactivity was still high."

The report said comments like this highlight "the complex mix of anger, distress and uncertainty."

While the report said the radiation exposure doses in Fukushima Prefecture are far lower than in Chernobyl, it quoted a physician as saying: "It is difficult to reveal what potential health effects may occur long term stretching into the future."

Governments have generally not emphasized potential threats in the vicinity of nuclear power plants, IFRC Under Secretary General Matthias Schmale told a news conference. He said governments should ensure such information is made more transparent, and added that the Fukushima disaster has not ended.

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