

Archive

Kobe Remembers Killer Quake 10 Years Ago

October 30, 2009 08:15 AM

The people in and around Kobe, Japan, are commemorating the 10th anniversary of a major earthquake, which left almost 6,500 people dead.

Ten years to the minute, at 5:46 a.m., Kobe paused to remember those who perished in the 7.3 magnitude earthquake.

In Higashi Park candles were lit for each of the 6,433 people who died on January 17, 1995.

Kobe Mayor Tatsuo Yada told those who gathered for the memorial that that last October's killer quake in Niigata, Japan, and the Indian Ocean tsunami last month are reminders of the inherent danger from nature.

At an indoor ceremony here later in the day, Emperor Akihito said he hopes the memories of the tragedy a decade ago stay alive.

The Emperor says he wants those who survived the Kobe earthquake to convey to the rest of the world their experiences and achievements so society can become safer in the face of natural disasters.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake, as it is known here, caused nearly \$100 billion worth of damage and left several hundred thousand people homeless.

While Kobe's infrastructure has been totally rebuilt, many of the survivors in this city of 1.5 million people have not recovered. Surveys show that nearly half of the residents say their lives are not yet back to normal.

Resident Moto Shinoda says the past decade has been especially tough on the elderly who lost their homes.

Mr. Shinoda says he and others have struggled to maintain their independence but it has been a difficult 10 years.

The quake also continues to take its toll on the young. Officials say more than 1,000 children still require mental health treatment for trauma suffered from the quake.

Japan is one of the world's most earthquake-prone nations. Despite that, government officials say almost half of the country's towns and cities are still unprepared to deal with the aftermath of a devastating tremor. They are concerned that communities lack emergency response plans, have not formed local rescue teams and have taken no steps to reinforce public buildings, such as schools.