



Two weeks after Japan's devastating tsunami, displaced children still living in fear, Save the Children says

(25 March 2011) **Tokyo** Two weeks after being displaced by Japan's devastating earthquake and tsunami, children living in evacuation centres in the north east of the country are suffering anxiety as a result of their experiences, Save the Children said today.

Up to 100,000 children were displaced by the disaster. Save the Children teams working across the affected area have received reports of children being unable to sleep, suffering nightmares, and being haunted by memories of what happened to them.

Stephen McDonald, Save the Children's response team leader in Japan said: "Over the past fortnight, families and children caught up in this disaster have had their lives turned upside down. They have lost their homes, all their belongings and in some cases their family and friends in sudden circumstances. It is essential that children are given all the support they need to come to terms with what has happened so they can avoid emotional problems later on."

Children have spoken of suffering nightmares about the tsunami, and of their fears that the event could repeat itself. In Minimisanriku, a town badly damaged by the disaster, twelve-year old Riko Tomita recalled cars floating towards her. She said she could not imagine rebuilding her life in the same way.

"I was terrified," she said. "I could not believe what I was seeing. We cannot even think about returning home - my house has been destroyed and besides, we are frightened of another tsunami coming."

Save the Children has also met parents and teachers who have spoken of their concerns about children's wellbeing in the aftermath of the disaster.

"Some of the children saw bodies in the trees," said Hiroko Akama, a teacher at Kazuma elementary school in Ischinomaki. "One girl saw her mother swept away in the tsunami. Lots of the children are very withdrawn and quiet. In the future, when they remember what has happened, I don't know how they will cope." Save the Children teams are operating across the affected region to help children affected by the earthquake and tsunami by setting up a network of 'Child Friendly Spaces'.

These are protective play areas that help relieve the anxiety faced by children in the aftermath of disasters and allow them to spend time with other children and play while being supervised by responsible adults.

The play areas also give parents much needed time that they can dedicate to finding food sources, work, accommodation and locating other friends and family.

Mai Miura, 12, attended her first session at a child-friendly space in Ishinomaki on Thursday. "I'm happy we have this because this means we can meet other children," she said. "I haven't seen my friends for a long time, and we have been very bored in the evacuation centre."