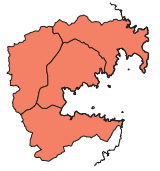


## Staying Close by Their Sorrow



▲“Sending our thoughts to the coast of Minamisanriku” took place at Shizugawa Junior High School at the suggestion of an NPO involved in relief operations. At the gathering, together with students and residents, Self-Defense Forces personnel stood quietly facing the sea.

Photo courtesy of Fukuda Saori

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the Japan Self-Defense Forces were launched to search for missing persons and to repair roads in Minamisanriku. It was the custom of the Self-Defense Forces personnel to always offer a silent prayer to the victims of the disaster before commencing work.

Many residents had lost their loved ones, homes, or workplaces in the disaster. It took a long time for them to accept that reality, however. On May 11, 2011, a gathering called “Sending our thoughts to the coast of Minamisanriku” took place at the suggestion of an NPO. At that time, people were reluctant to even use a word like “mourning.”

The event created a time for individuals to quietly turn and face the sea while listening to music performed by live musicians. Residents who had been stout-heartedly managing evacuation sites or preparing emergency food for distribution to the community found themselves with tears rolling down their cheeks.

Personnel of the Self-Defense Forces Western Army, which was stationed on the grounds of the Shizugawa Junior High School, also quietly joined the line of participants. Their kindness and sincerity, allowing their hearts to go out to us in our grief and sharing in our mourning, gave us great strength.