



17 July 2020
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Dear Sentinel Asia colleagues,

**Sincere gratitude for your support during the “Heavy rain of July, Reiwa 2” in Japan,
statement of our commitment to Sentinel Asia, and request for your continued support
under the COVID-19 pandemic**

For more than several months, we have been faced by unprecedented crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the world, more than 10 million people have been infected by COVID-19 and more than 500,000 have perished. The situation seems to keep deteriorating and the numbers are continuously growing. This COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way of our lives completely.

A natural disaster amid COVID-19 could be a real nightmare. The local authorities and the people in the affected area will be forced to address “dual challenges”: they will have to combat disasters, while keeping themselves safe from COVID-19. The newly introduced norms such as “social distancing” and “self-seclusion” for containment of the spread of the virus make rescue and evacuation activities much more difficult than ever before.

Now, the season has come when water-related natural disasters such as typhoons, monsoons, and tropical cyclones are expected to occur frequently. Particularly, the Asia-Pacific region is prone to such disasters. Moreover, as this region is the most densely populated region, people in this region are more vulnerable to risks caused by the dual challenges than anywhere else.

However, looking at the bright side, remote-sensing technologies and our cooperation under “Sentinel Asia” could bring us hope. Satellite observation data provided by Data Provider Nodes (DPNs) of Sentinel Asia enable us to monitor or narrow down the possible affected area remotely, without visiting the area. Then, damage maps generated from satellite data in combination with open street maps provided by Data Analysis Nodes (DANs) of Sentinel Asia could contribute to detecting the area more precisely, local authorities’ identifying appropriate evacuation sites and establishing evacuation plans. Also, members of Sentinel Asia from the international community could appeal to the humanitarian community for solidarity and for support based on the damage maps and contribute to mobilizing relief parties and supplies effectively under the mobility and distancing restrictions imposed by the COVID-19. Furthermore, as Sentinel Asia is mandated to address the entire disaster risk management cycle including the pre-disaster phase, Sentinel Asia could contribute to earning the lead time to respond to possible disasters, which has become particularly crucial under the COVID-19 pandemic.



In fact, now we realize keenly the benefit and blessing of Sentinel Asia. Record-breaking torrential heavy rain hit the prefectures of Kumamoto and Kagoshima in the southern Japanese island of Kyushu on 4 July 2020. The heavy rain, named “Heavy rain of July, Reiwa 2” triggered floods and landslides, which claimed at least 68 people’s lives. Many people remain missing and thousands of houses have been destroyed. What is different from ordinary disasters is that we have been confronted by the very dual challenges: The COVID-19 pandemic has complicated the rescue efforts. The need to maintain social distancing has reduced capacity at shelters, and the fear of catching and spreading COVID-19 has dissuaded volunteers from coming to help who would otherwise offer help.

Thus, the help from Sentinel Asia has been more precious than ever. In this case, immediately after the emergency observation request (EOR) from JAXA, several DPNs conducted observations, then several DANs analyzed and provided value-added products. Also, the EOR was escalated to the International Disaster Charter with the support of Sentinel Asia colleagues and an expert from the Sentinel Asia community has been supporting as the Project Manager. We are still struggling with the disaster, but we have been greatly encouraged by the thought and the fact that you, Sentinel Asia colleagues, are with us. We would like to take this opportunity to extend our sincere gratitude to all of you who have supported us.

As we ourselves have experienced, under this critical situation, Sentinel Asia could not be more helpful and beneficial than ever before. Sentinel Asia could harmonize disaster response approach with the combat against COVID-19 and provide solutions for dual challenges. Albeit the devastating circumstances, through cooperation, we could turn the current adversity into a good opportunity to enhance the value of Sentinel Asia. Sentinel Asia could be a model cooperation platform in the context of global agenda such as Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Therefore, we, the Sentinel Asia Executive Secretariat will be committed to supporting Sentinel Asia and make our best to collaborate with DPNs, DANs, and all Joint Project Team members to ensure the normal operation of Sentinel Asia’s emergency observations. At the same time, as solidarity among Sentinel Asia members will be pivotal, we kindly request you for your continued support, just as you have supported us. We believe we can build back better from the crises and we look forward to meeting you again after we have recovered with resilience.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "平井毅" (Hirabayashi Takeshi).

HIRABAYASHI, Takeshi
Executive Secretary
Sentinel Asia Executive Secretariat