

NATIONAL

Support efforts begin across Japan to help coronavirus-hit Wuhan

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People from around Japan have begun offering support to the residents that remain in locked-down Wuhan, a major Chinese city at the center of a coronavirus outbreak.

Inagora Inc., an e-commerce operator based in Tokyo, launched a campaign Monday to ship face masks, free of charge, to residents of the city and in other parts of the Hubei province in which it is located. The operator of the Wandou e-commerce platform, which sells Japanese goods to Chinese customers, saw all 10,000 packages each containing five face masks sell out within about an hour after it started accepting orders.

“I hope people there can spend the Lunar New Year holiday at ease,” said Inagora spokesperson Kanako Itano.

According to Itano, paid orders for face masks have skyrocketed since the outbreak of the new coronavirus, increasing up to some 300-fold per day. Orders for antibacterial sheets, mouthwash and hand soaps have also risen sharply.

On Monday, the city of Oita sent 30,000 masks it had been keeping for disaster relief purposes in boxes with a message reading “Wuhan Jiayou!” which means “Hang in there, Wuhan!” in Chinese. Oita and Wuhan have been sister cities for 40 years.

The masks will be sent to Wuhan via the Red Cross network, because the current situation prevents the city from directly receive donated goods from across the globe, according to the Oita Municipal Government’s Cultural and International Affairs Division.

“The people of Wuhan are like family,” said Soichiro Hayashi, head of the division’s International Affairs Office. “I hope people can return to their ordinary lives as quickly as possible.”

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government donated 20,000 protective suits for medical staff working in Hubei to treat patients with pneumonia caused by the coronavirus. The suits were loaded on a plane that the national government chartered to repatriate Japanese citizens stuck in Wuhan.

Peace Winds Japan, a nonprofit organization specializing in humanitarian aid, has sent one staff member to China to work with local disaster relief groups to distribute face masks and other goods the organization has sent to the country.