

RECOVERY FROM THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE,
FIVE YEARS LATER

Statement by Mr. Mitsuhiro Wada, Consul-General of Japan in Detroit,
On the Occasion of the Fifth Anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake

Five years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011. It was an unprecedented disaster which resulted in a tremendous loss of life and property mainly in Japan's Tohoku region. On this most somber occasion, I wish to offer my heartfelt sympathy to all of those affected.

In the aftermath of the earthquake and resultant tsunami, we were overwhelmed by an outpouring of compassion and support from the international community, particularly from the United States. The Japan Center for International Exchange reported that Americans contributed more than \$730 million—the largest philanthropic response in U.S. history for a disaster in a developed country.

While the U.S. military formed Operation Tomodachi (or, “Operation Friends,”) to offer on-the-ground humanitarian assistance, countless individuals and local entities in Michigan and Ohio, including, corporations non-profit agencies, academic institutions, religious and community groups, collected generous monetary and material donations and offered prayers and support for the victims.

Such goodwill from the residents of Michigan and Ohio continues to this day. One example is the ‘Ishinomaki 2.0’ program which is implemented by participants including a professional group of architects, creators, scholars, and others in collaboration with the Center for Japanese Studies (CJS) of the University of Michigan. Under this program, they seek to not simply restore the city as it was, but also to completely renovate the City of Ishinomaki (Miyagi Prefecture). University engineering students and others

have been dispatched to Ishinomaki for research and some of their findings will also be applied towards rehabilitation efforts underway in the city of Detroit.

As another example of the heartwarming response, then 8-year-old Lebanon, Ohio resident, Ms. Mia Moor, held a wristband fundraiser, and established the “Ishinomaki Playground Project.” She dedicated the construction of new playground facilities in a destroyed park of Ishinomaki City—Mia’s great grandmother’s hometown. With the generous assistance of the University of Cincinnati’s architectural department, the playground was constructed in May 2014.

These acts of kindness are testaments to the deep, long-cherished friendship between the Japanese and American people. Taking this opportunity, may I once again express my profound gratitude, on behalf of the Government and people of Japan. We will never forget your goodwill.

The reconstruction timeline has been set for a ten-year period, and we are now approaching the half-way point. With the collective efforts of the nation, we are fully engaged in the initiatives and the reconstruction is proceeding steadily. It is my great hope that many foreign tourists will visit and enjoy Tohoku.

Japan will host the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and matches will be played in Kamaishi City, which sustained damage from the tsunami. The government will extend its full support to Kamaishi City to ensure a successful event. What's more, the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics will be held in 2020. It would be wonderful to see the Olympic torch relay proceed through recovering areas, which will hopefully host Olympic camps and qualifying rounds.

In short, without the reconstruction of Tohoku, Japan itself cannot revive. It is to this end that I humbly ask for the continued

support of the international community.

March 11, 2016

Mitsuhiro Wada
Consul General of Japan in Detroit

(attachment)

Tohoku's Recovery

On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, hereunder, is a status report of Tohoku's recovery.

1. Reconstruction is proceeding steadily

The reconstruction phase is set for ten years, and we are now approaching the halfway point.

As well as spending from the national treasury, including tax hikes, everyone in the afflicted areas and local government organizations have been making every endeavor toward the reconstruction, in the spirit of "self-help, mutual help, and public help". Employees from local governments, private companies and organizations across Japan have been dispatched in order to support the afflicted areas.

With the collective efforts of the nation, we are engaged in initiatives for reconstruction proceeding steadily.

2. Tohoku's reconstruction

Reconstruction in Iwate and Miyagi Prefectures is entering a new stage. The Tohoku region in particular is famous for processed seafood, with the Sanriku area being one of the 3 greatest fishing grounds in the world; yet, it suffered calamitous damage due to the tsunami.

However, recovery and reconstruction is gradually proceeding.

Stretching 880 meters, the world's largest fish market was established in Miyagi Prefecture. We aim for full-scale recovery of the fisheries industry, by shipping high added-value seafood, in line with "HACCP" which is the global foods hygiene control system. The Tohoku region in particular is famous for processed seafood, with the Sanriku area being one of the 3 greatest fishing grounds in the world; yet it suffered calamitous damage due to the tsunami.

3. Fukushima also progressing, aside from the coastal areas

Except for the eastern coastal areas on the Pacific side, which were afflicted by the nuclear power plant incident, reconstruction is well under way in Fukushima Prefecture.

Reconstruction along coastal areas has regrettably only just begun and will unavoidably require much more time.

However, such areas only account for 7% of the surface area of Fukushima Prefecture.

In most places in Fukushima, people are living safely in peace of mind.

What is more, the situation at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant is under control, with robots being deployed to aid the extremely tricky process of decommissioning.

In Fukushima, the Innovation Coast concept, which aims to create new industry by developing the research fields for cutting-edge technology for decommissioning and robot technology, is gathering speed. In the future, Fukushima will become an area for international industry including decommissioning and robot technology. There are high hopes Fukushima Prefecture, which is involved in generating renewable energy through biomass, using Fukushima-cultivated timber..

4. Japanese Foods are safe to eat

Since the nuclear power plant incident, about 80 countries and regions have cited concerns over contamination by radioactive materials, and restricted and suspended the imports of Japanese food products. Since then, while these restrictions have been partially eased or lifted, some restrictions still remain.

Japan is inspecting radioactive materials based on the most stringent baseline levels in the world, based on scientific evidence.

With great expense, every single grain and bag of rice grown in Fukushima Prefecture is subject to strict examination.

In January this year, based on past data, the EU significantly lifted import restrictions on food products from Japan.

I hope to see the remaining restrictions lifted in other countries

and regions based upon scientific evidence.

5. Visit Tohoku

In order to increase the inflow of foreign tourists, the Japanese government is promoting its Visit Japan campaign, thanks to which the number of foreigners visiting Japan yearly is likely to reach 20 million. However, regrettably, Tohoku has not caught this momentum.

Brands of Japanese sake produced in Fukushima take the most gold medals at domestic tasting competitions.

Tohoku also boasts many ski slopes and hot springs, as well as world cultural heritage sites such as Hiraizumi, which are steeped in Japanese culture, and are a must-see for any tourist. Tohoku is home to many archaeological excavation sites from the Jomon Era, which are said to be the very origins of Japan.

Tourists can discover the good old Japanese countryside, and the rustic side of Japan.

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