



Japanese envoy Kaoru Ishikawa said Wednesday that his country will need long-term support for its orphaned children. JOHN MORSTAD FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

INTERVIEW

Japan will rise again, ambassador says

Authorities taking the 'utmost precaution' in dealing with the nuclear emergency, Ishikawa insists

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Despite his country's deepening nuclear crisis and widespread devastation, Japan's ambassador to Canada said his nation will "stand up" again and rebuild much the same way it rose from the ashes of the Second World War.

"We know what Japan looked like on Aug. 15, 1945," said Kaoru Ishikawa, referring to Japan's surrender to the Allies after the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "We will certainly overcome this [time]."

With a possible meltdown from the disabled Fukushima nuclear plant, the threat of exposure to nuclear radiation weighs heavily on the collective psyche of Japan. Japan is the only country in the world to have been the victim of a nuclear attack, an event that is in the living memory of many Japanese.

Yet while other countries rethink their nuclear strategies, Japan appears to be staying the course.

"Unfortunately, we have a sad history," Mr. Ishikawa said in an

interview at the Japanese consulate in Montreal on Wednesday. "Without any chauvinism, we are the most sensitive people in the world about the negative side of [nuclear power]. But we need to live with the positive side of the coin of nuclear energy, too."

The handling of the damage at the Fukushima reactor since the quake on Friday has brought criticism of Japanese authorities' readiness and postquake management. But Mr. Ishikawa insisted officials have shown caution in their response, extending the evacuation zone to an area stretching 20 kilometres from the Fukushima plant.

"That is the lesson of the past," he said. "We are taking the utmost precaution."

Mr. Ishikawa was in Montreal for his first official visit to Quebec since becoming ambassador to Canada last year. Both his wife and two grown daughters are in Tokyo and are safe - he has Skyped with them - but he has friends who have been unable to reach loved ones. "So I forbid myself from expressing relief for my own family,"

he said.

Still, Mr. Ishikawa said, the Japanese have shown resilience in the quake's aftermath, and there have been no signs of looting. "We are not that kind of people."

From bouquets of flowers left at the Japanese embassy in Ottawa to the shipment of 25,000 thermal blankets by the federal government, Canadian support is helping the Japanese cope with the aftermath of its earthquake, he said. Mr. Ishikawa cautioned that the nation's critical needs will continue.

He raised the predicament of Japanese children who may have lost families in the earthquake and tsunami, which flattened houses and swept away communities.

While Japan still regards the more than 11,000 people missing in the disaster as survivors who could be rescued, the reality is that "there are villages and towns that do not answer our calls," he said.

Some children were at school when the earthquake struck on Friday, while their families may have perished.

"We will need long-term support

for these children," he said.

"Maybe they would deserve a nice summer holiday to forget the ordeal. They might need scholarships. I'm not speaking about money. We are saying, 'Please don't forget about the children.'"

Mr. Ishikawa said Prime Minister Stephen Harper called him Friday morning to offer Canadian assistance to Japan, an offer that has so far translated into the delivery of the blankets due to arrive late Wednesday night, Canadian time.

Canada has also offered the help of a 17-member victim-identification team as well as chemical, biological and nuclear technical expertise and equipment.

Japan rebuilt after the Second World War, with the help of the international community, and went on to become the world's third-largest economy. Mr. Ishikawa expressed gratitude for Canada's support since Friday and said Japan will bounce back again.

"We need your moral support. We need the encouragement. We need the compassion," he said. "But we will one day stand up."