

Remarks by H.E. Kaoru Ishikawa
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I. Introduction

Allow me to begin by thanking Ambassador Jonathan Fried and the Canadian Embassy to Japan – and all other major participants – for organizing this series of seminars to further promote and strengthen the bilateral commercial relations between Japan and Canada. Indeed, following the disaster that struck my country over three months ago, I know that there have been many questions and concerns about the impact of the disaster on the Canadian and global economy. Today, I hope to shed some light on the recent developments in Japan, and how my country – driven by the resilient spirit of its people – is moving forward in a positive direction.

II. Appreciation to Canada

On March 11, 2011, Japan was struck by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake, the highest ever observed in my country. A tectonic plate shift of 500 kilometres long and 200 kilometres wide led to

powerful and violent tsunamis which created waves as high as 40 meters; their effects were further amplified by a saw-tooth coastline adjacent to steep mountains with countless villages and municipal offices. We swallow with difficulty the fact that these villages and offices no longer exist.

In addition to the countless lives lost, and the many more who have no shelter, the disaster also severely damaged a nuclear power plant in the affected area. The reactors at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant, which supplied a significant amount of energy for the region and the country, were shut down automatically after the earthquake, but the emergency generators used to cool the heat of the fuel were no match for the 20-metre high waves of the ensuing tsunami. The Japanese government, with the assistance of nuclear energy experts from within and outside of Japan, is making progress to ensure a safe and secure shut down of the plant.

The Government of Canada has been tremendously supportive as Japan deals with the various aspects of recovery. Displaced residents of the affected regions are kept warm with 25,000 Canadian thermal blankets, and workers and engineers at the nuclear plant are now equipped with 5,000 dosimeters and 150 portable radiation survey meters provided by the Canadian government. On April 1, 2011, Ambassador Fried visited the affected region and showed his unwavering support and encouragement for my country.

Furthermore, Canadians from coast to coast have given generously -- more than 34 million dollars -- through the Canadian Red Cross as well as various fundraising events across the country to assist the disaster relief efforts. And Canadians of all generations have shown their support in a variety of other ways, including the folding of tens of thousands of paper cranes, which as some of you may know, are a symbol of prayer and encouragement to the Japanese people.

It is this kind of support – offered by Canada and our friends throughout the world – that has given irreplaceable hope and strength to the Japanese people to recover and rebuild. For this, I would like to say “thank you.”

Today, I would like to share with you the steps that Japan is taking in making progress and moving forward.

III. Rebuilding

Almost immediately following the earthquake and tsunami, emergency restoration measures were enacted to restore critical transportation arteries throughout the affected region. According to the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), major expressways have been restored, the *Shinkansen* (bullet train) route has resumed operations, and quays of all major ports in the Pacific Coast have re-opened.

Another significant development was the immediate and rapid reconstruction efforts of the Sendai Airport, which was engulfed by

the tsunami. On April 13, 2011, the airport welcomed its first commercial flight landing on its runway since the disaster. Incidentally, near the same runway, a local resident used debris from the disaster to write “ARIGATO” in large capital letters to express his gratitude to departing foreign military personnel who provided assistance in the region. These were very moving and symbolic occurrences indeed. The British media¹ have called it the “astonishing speed of reconstruction.” And, former President Bill Clinton, during the Inter-Action Summit in Quebec City last month, remarked “do not underestimate Japan” as he referred to a television report that large fissures in an expressway had been repaired in only 3 days.

IV. Disposal of Debris

Many of you may have seen the images of rows upon rows of vehicles being crushed and washed away like toy cars by the force of the tsunami, or the surreal footage of large ships mounted on top of buildings.

As you can imagine, the cleanup of debris is another major challenge. It has been estimated that the amount of debris in the 3 most-affected prefectures – Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima – totals 25 million tons. To put this into perspective, this reportedly equals 23-years-worth of regular waste produced in these prefectures. The reality that we are working with is that the land for dumping is scarce, and burning wood

¹ The Guardian, Daily Mail, and Sun: March 24, 2011

debris can be environmentally hazardous as they may contain toxic chemicals.

Under these circumstances, sorting and reusing this debris is a critical method to ensure a speedy cleanup. Some municipalities, most notably Sendai, are sorting the debris into several types, such as wood, home electronics, vehicles, and toxic materials such as asbestos, and then turning most of this material into practical use, such as turning wood into chips for biomass fuel, and using laminate boards for temporary housing or pulp material. Other cities such as Iwanuma plan to move the debris to the coastal areas to construct mounts topped with earth to be used as breakwaters as well as evacuation sites in times of emergency. While the sorting process requires time in the short-term, we are able to create safe and secure communities in the long term as a result of this process.

I would also add that this process involves not only the public authorities, but also the private sector such as cement factories as a way to stimulate the market cycle, and I foresee many more initiatives that incorporate public-private partnerships.

V. Nuclear Safety

I would like to address the nuclear safety issues. As you may have heard, a total of 5 nuclear power plants were affected by the earthquake and tsunami. All of them immediately shut down after the

earthquake as programmed, and all but one – the Fukushima Dai-Ichi Plant – were not damaged by the tsunami that hit these plants. The reactors of the Fukushima Dai-Ichi Plant, which supplied a significant amount of energy for the region and the country, were shut down automatically after the earthquake like the others, however not only the usual power grid but also the emergency generators used to cool the heat of the fuel were no match for the 14 to 20 meter high waves of the ensuing tsunami. As many of you may know, experts from both within and outside Japan are working hard to resolve the situation at this particular plant to ensure a safe shut down.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) drafted a preliminary report following their fact-finding mission to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant a few weeks ago. The fact-finding team was comprised of international experts from twelve countries from around the world. In their draft report, released June 1, 2011, they mentioned several preliminary findings and lessons learned, and I quote:

-“Japan’s response to the nuclear accident has been exemplary, particularly illustrated by the dedicated, determined and expert staff working under exceptional circumstances”

–“Japan’s long-term response, including the evacuation of the area around the stricken reactors, has been impressive and well organized. A suitable and timely follow-up programme on public and worker exposures and health monitoring would be beneficial.” –“The tsunami hazard for several sites was underestimated. Nuclear plant designers and operators should appropriately evaluate and protect against the

risks of all natural hazards, and should periodically update those assessments and assessment methodologies” –“Nuclear regulatory systems should address extreme events adequately, including their periodic review, and should ensure that regulatory independence and clarity of roles are preserved” and

-“The Japanese accident demonstrates the value of hardened on-site Emergency Response Centres with adequate provisions for handling all necessary emergency roles, including communications.”

The crisis at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant reminded Japan and the international community of the harsh and unfortunate reality that Japan lacks significant sources of fossil energy. In 2011, prior to the disaster, nuclear power supplied upwards of 30% of total electricity generated in Japan.

Our government – and presumably the global community-at-large – will need to examine the lessons learned from this situation and advance towards more robust nuclear safety. During his visit to Japan on March 31, 2011, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France acknowledged a need for further discussion on this matter during a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Kan. President Sarkozy, as chair of this year’s G8 and G20, promoted and facilitated such discussions during the Deauville Summit.

Furthermore, the government has acknowledged a need to reassess the current energy policy, and to move in the direction of promoting natural and renewable energy including wind, solar, and biomass

energy. Another critical aspect of Japan's energy supply is conservation, of which Japan is considered a global leader, with world-leading initiatives in promoting and producing energy-efficient products for consumer use. This type of energy policy will not only be better for the environment, but with the power of innovation, it will also fuel growth in the "green economy."

VI. Lessons learned

The Japanese government has established a framework for reconstruction plans based on three key principles: first, to create a regional society that is highly resistant to natural disasters; second, to establish a social system that allows people to live in harmony with the global environment; and third, to build a compassionate society that cares about people, in particular, the vulnerable.

The last point in particular is very important as we rebuild. In the aftermath of the Hanshin Earthquake that hit Kobe in 1995, the government began to relocate senior citizens to safe locations. While this was done out of concerns for their health and security, the government did not realize at the time that, this would inevitably take them away from their friends and families, severing human connections that had been sources of their happiness and well-being. This has taught us that relocation must be done on a community basis, maintaining the intricate human relationships that enrich all of us.

Realizing the lessons learned and collaborating with local and global partners, I am fully confident that the resiliency of the Japanese people will enhance a stronger sense of community and society, which in turn will drive a more robust economy.

VII. Conclusion

Throughout its history, Japan has faced many challenges. Some were called insurmountable. Others were destined to seal our fate as a nation. In the end, we rose to the challenge, and the Japanese spirit fought back. Today, amid the scenes of destruction and devastation, I know that the people of my country will move forward, recover from this hardship, and rebuild once again to become the vibrant economic and cultural centre of Asia. This is part of who we are. This is our tradition.

The strength and resiliency of the Japanese people can be seen in all walks of life. Many of you may have heard of the so-called “Fukushima 50,” a group of 50 engineers and technicians – that has now grown to more than 2,000 – who have volunteered to stay behind in order to stabilize the reactors, and assess the damage and radiation levels at the Fukushima Plant.

As we move forward, we will always remember our friends who came to us during this time of need. The words, thoughts, and prayers of all Canadians have created hope and strength to the people of Japan. The generosity of those who gave through the Canadian Red Cross will help the survivors and victims begin a new life. And the support

and assistance offered by Canada will strengthen the close friendship shared between our two peoples.

As Ambassador, I wish to invite all of you to witness the resilience of Japan and take advantage of the many opportunities that my country has to offer.

I thank you for your kind attention.