

Hope blossoms after Japan quake

In a striking exhibition, pupils rocked by tragedy a year ago see a future with hearts and budding trees. **TONY LOFARO** reports.

A child's drawing of a Japanese coastal town shows the buildings, houses, parks, roads and, of course, the cherry blossoms that are sprouting at this time of year.

The drawing is of Onagawa, one of the many Japanese towns that was heavily damaged in the Great East Japan Earthquake, which rocked the country a year ago. The colourful drawing was done by 10-year-old Mitsuki Abe, one of thousands of children from the town who experienced first-hand the devastation caused by earthquake which measured a magnitude of 9.0.

"I drew the town in 10 years," writes Mitsuki, a Grade 5 student, in a caption to his drawing. "I drew it because I want Onagawa to go back to being the shining town that it was before. I want to return the sea and the cherry trees to their former glory," he writes.

The drawing by Mitsuki is part of the Kizuna Picture Project and one of 80 children's drawings, includ-



Drawings by Japanese schoolchildren inspired by the aftermath of the earthquake in the country a year ago do not show signs of despair, but of hope and optimism. The exhibition, which also includes dramatic news photos of the tragedy, opens today at the Embassy of Japan on Sussex Drive and continues until March 23.

ing stark news photos of schools and hospitals in the affected regions of Sendai and Fukushima, that are featured in a new exhibition on display at the Embassy of Japan on Sussex Drive. The exhibition, "One Year After The Great East Japan Earthquake — Japan's Road to Recovery" opens today and continues until March 23.

The drawings and photographs provided by the Japanese Red Cross and news agencies were exhibited in Japan following the March 11 earthquake. The response was so overwhelming it was decided to send copies to more than 100 Japanese embassies and consulates abroad where they could also be

displayed.

The earthquake, which also caused tidal waves measuring almost 12 metres high, resulted in the damage of 370,000 buildings and the deaths of 15,853 people, and forced about 400,000 Japanese into shelters. More than 3,280 people are still reported missing, according to figures from the Japanese government.

The statistics are a grim reminder of what the country experienced, but today, there's a renewed sense of optimism, as evidenced by the simple drawings of schoolchildren, said Mariko Kaneko, a counsellor at the embassy.

"I think the boy is imagining what it was like before, he's also creating

a new town or what it will be like in about 10 years. This is the image of the future of how he hopes it will be. You can see the cherry blossoms in the drawing. For us they are a symbol of the spring, of renewal and a new life."

She said she saw some of the same themes in drawings by other children.

"It's their wish and their hope to return to normal and they want to regain what was lost," she added.

Another drawing by Grade 5 student Reina Abe shows a young girl holding a big red heart, encircled by 13 white envelopes with tiny wings on them. Written on the envelopes in different languages are the words

"thank you."

"I received so much help from so many people. I drew this picture as a message to them all," writes Reina in the caption.

Kaneko said the children's drawings do not show signs of despair or sadness, but of hope and optimism.

"The children show what might happen in 10 years, their dreams and what they want to be. At least they have those kinds of dreams," she said.

The news photographs were collected from different disaster-affected regions and focus on the aftermath, the cleanup and the rebuilding efforts by the Japanese. They are in stark contrast to the simple drawings of the children, and vividly illustrate the horror and traumatic conditions people from the affected regions experienced.

The exhibit runs March 10 and 11 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and March 12 to 16 and March 19 to 23 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

A candlelight vigil organized by JETAA Ottawa (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program) will be held Sunday at 7 p.m. at the Centennial Flame on Parliament Hill in commemoration of the one-year anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake.



PHOTOS BY JEAN LEVAC, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, EXCEPT ABOVE RIGHT, COURTESY OF EMBASSY OF JAPAN

A drawing by Japanese student Mitsuki Abe, 10, shows his earthquake-ravaged town, Onagawa, awash in cherry blossoms. Right, Grade 5 pupil Reina Abe says she drew this picture to send a message of thanks for 'so much help from so many people.' Their drawings go on display today.