

December 16, 2011

Dear Friends,

I. March 11th

On March 11th, Japan was struck by a three-fold disaster causing the loss of nearly 20,000 lives. We have received many messages, memorials, donations, charity events and volunteer projects, some of which are still going on. The Government of the United States responded immediately to the crisis with measures such as “Operation Tomodachi” which was extremely effective and very encouraging to us. I would like to express heartfelt gratitude on behalf of Japan.



Photos courtesy of U.S. Navy

II. The Emperor and Empress

As the earthquake shook the Imperial Residence, the Emperor switched on the TV. As she learned to do from her mother, the Empress ran to open a door to the outside to ensure an escape route. The Imperial couple went out into the courtyard and sat on the shuddering earth. The Emperor supported his wife as the tremors continued, and they were unhurt.

On March 16th, the Emperor addressed the Japanese public with a message on television.

“It is my heartfelt hope that the people will continue to work hand in hand, treating each other with compassion, in order to overcome these trying times.

I believe it extremely important for us all to share with the victims as much as possible, in whatever way we can, their hardship in the coming days. It is my sincere hope that those who have been affected by the disaster will never give up hope and take good care of themselves as they live through the days ahead, and that each and every Japanese will continue to care for the afflicted areas and the people for years to come and, together with the afflicted, watch over and support their path to recovery.”

In late March, the Emperor and Empress started paying visits once a week to evacuees living in shelters in various places beginning with Tokyo, a high school in Saitama, and community centers in Chiba. Kitaibaraki was the first tsunami-stricken area they visited. They also visited Miyagi, Iwate and

Fukushima Prefecture, in the following weeks. The Imperial Couple also opened their summer villa in Nasu Heights in Tochigi Prefecture, allowing evacuees to stay there.

Kitaibaraki, April 22, 2011



Saitama, April 8, 2011



Photos courtesy of the Imperial Household Agency of Japan

As the Emperor encouraged, the Japanese people were united in the spirit of helping each other and working hard for the recovery and revival of Tohoku. Over these last 9 months, we have come a long way. Japan is open for business and travel. We are determined to rebuild Tohoku as a region of safe, environmentally friendly and tight-knit communities, even though it will take several years to achieve.

Volunteers clear debris, Miyagi Prefecture, May 2011



Sailing out to fish from Ofunato, Iwate, Nov. 9, 2011



Photos Courtesy of Yahoo! Japan

III. US-Japan Relations in 2011

Our two countries and peoples worked in partnership to overcome the difficulties from the March 11th crises. The message from the United States to Japan: “You are not alone” is very touching for us. Many Japanese people have come to know the US as a true friend.

On December 3rd, the Japanese Cabinet Office announced the results of the 2011 public opinion poll. 82% of Japanese have friendly feelings for the United States, which is the highest number recorded since the poll was first taken in 1978.

Washington State especially, is close to Japan. The Japan Maritime Training Squadron visited Seattle to cement good relations between our naval forces in June. Late September saw the delivery of the first Boeing 787 Dreamliners to All Nippon Airways, which are now flying over the skies of Japan.



Photo Courtesy of The Boeing Company

Governor Gregoire visited Miyagi Prefecture on October 20th and delivered a poster of a check representing the 7.3 million US dollars that Washington State channeled through the Red Cross to Miyagi Prefecture. She also talked with residents of an elder-care facility which had been destroyed by the earthquake.



Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor

This year brought tragedy, but 2011 will be remembered also for our two peoples uniting to overcome challenges and further strengthening our bonds of friendship.

IV. Our Friendship in 2012

The year 2012 will be election year in the US and many other countries. I am not worried about how this will affect US-Japan relations. I am sure that the newly elected officials will look after our relationship on a national level, and our people are connected all the way down to the grassroots level. Japan has begun consultations with the US and other countries to initiate TPP, Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations. We need to shape our future relations so that all may enjoy peace and prosperity.



Photos courtesy of the Prime Minister and His Cabinet Office

2012 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Seattle World's Fair. Science and space were the main themes, but Japan was also an indispensable component of the Expo. A driving force behind its success was Mr. Gordon Clinton, mayor of Seattle in the years leading up to and during the World's Fair. He was also a champion of people to people relations and the sister city initiative, beginning by linking Seattle to Kobe in 1957. He was a great friend to Japan. His memorial service will take place today at Bayview Manor on Queen Anne Hill.

Next March 11th, the community will host a one-year memorial gathering at Seattle Center. I hope you will join us.



Photo courtesy of the North American Post



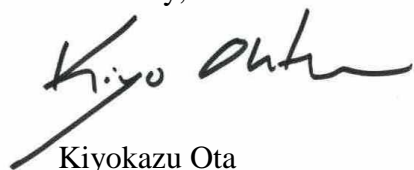
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
OF THE GIFT OF TREES

2012 is also the 100th anniversary of the gift of cherry trees which were transported from Yokohama, through Seattle and on to Washington DC and other cities. There will be centennial celebrations held in many cities around the US in April, including Seattle.

In October the US-Japan Council will hold their third annual conference in Seattle. We have many events to look forward to sharing together in the coming year.

I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Sincerely,



Kiyokazu Ota

Consul General of Japan in Seattle



December 8, 2011