

Good evening, everyone.

Japan's approach to international affairs focuses on diplomacy, including international cooperation. As a responsible member of the global community, Japan continues to act prudently in handling diplomatic affairs. The strong US-Japan alliance was reaffirmed during Secretary of State John Kerry's recent dialogue with Prime Minister Abe and Foreign Minister Kishida.

Japan is also committed to making significant contributions through what Bill Gates calls, "smart aid." Our partnership with the Gates Foundation on global health issues as well as our initiative to hold the upcoming TICAD 5, scheduled in June of this year, are just a couple of examples of such commitment among our numerous empowerment-oriented foreign aid programs.

The March 11<sup>th</sup> mega-quake and tsunami was the largest calamity Japan has experienced since WWII. Although we face a decade or more of challenges ahead, we take pride in not abandoning our chosen role on the international stage. I would also like to share with you that Japan is moving forward. We are open for business, entrepreneurialism, innovation, investment, leisure, study, and travel. Come see and participate in one, two or many ways, in our tremendous efforts of revitalization.

Our Government also sees the importance and value of grassroots interactions and connections. Many of you are aware of our forward-looking programs with special emphasis on the younger generation such as JET Program, student exchange and scholarships and the recent Kizuna Project. Since last summer, we have invited 1,000 American high school students to Japan and brought 1,000 Japanese high school students to the United States. I was impressed by their presentations as cultural ambassadors. Students from Roosevelt and Garfield promoted Fukushima and other affected areas as safe and attractive places to visit and live. Students from Japan shared their future goals and reminded us that, although they have faced tragedy, we should not forget that there are people suffering in other parts of the globe.

The Consulate-General of Japan in Seattle appreciates the Japan America Society's leading role in promoting cross-cultural understanding. Many activities throughout the year facilitate exchanges between our peoples, non-profits and companies of every size. John Broman of MeySen Academy in Miyagi pointed out, and I witnessed, the society's instrumental role in making such connections over the Pacific to help rebuild Tohoku.

Mr. Ogata of Eitoku Seaweed Company came to Seattle to express his gratitude for aid from World Concern, a Seattle-based non-profit, which enabled him to resume his business. Mrs. Sato and her son of Kesennuma Kuwa Cha Company may be able to expand their small business of 100% organic mulberry tea to the US, thanks to the connections they made at the "Shout Out to Japan" event. Peace Winds America, the YMCA of Greater Seattle, Songs for Hope and many other organizations from this region continue to be engaged in the rebuilding of Tohoku.

Pacific Northwest businesses such as Amazon are opening locations in Tohoku, and others such as Boeing, Costco, Microsoft, Starbucks, and Weyerhaeuser continue their close business relations with Japan. The Japan America Society of the State of Washington is made up of influential and dedicated corporate, non-profit and individual members with a vision and a strong sense of social responsibility, so I have high expectations of your future undertakings and accomplishments. Let us take this momentum and run with it to establish even broader and deeper cooperation. Thank you all for your continued engagement in our international friendship.