

Reconstruction Forum on the 5th Anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake

Minister's Remarks

I am Tsuyoshi Takagi, Minister for Reconstruction. I would like to thank you for attendance at the “Reconstruction Forum on the 5th Anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake” today.

Five years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake. Although many things have been achieved over the last five years, many people are still continuously engaged in the efforts for reconstruction in the disaster-affected areas in a variety of positions—disaster victims, municipalities, private companies, NPOs, and volunteers. In contrast, we are concerned that people living outside Tohoku do not recall any more the fact that the disaster-affected areas are still on the path to recovering from the earthquake five years ago.

This June has been named “Tohoku Reconstruction Month.” We decided to hold a variety of events during this

month, including today's symposium. We expect that people both in Japan and overseas look back on what we have achieved over these past five years and what we still have left to do, and take advantage of the lessons learned to help reconstruction efforts in the future. We hope that through today's symposium and the various sessions that will be held here, today will be a day for everyone to look back on the disaster and learn new lessons.

We are now at the halfway point in the ten-year reconstruction period from the Great East Japan Earthquake, with the start of the latter five years of the "Reconstruction and Revitalization Period" from this April. Support has come in many forms, including from within Japan and over 160 countries and regions, such as "Operation Tomodachi" by the United States, as well as more than 40 international organizations. We would like to offer you our most sincere thanks.

Images of the earthquake have spread worldwide. I am sure that there are many people who have wondered if

Japan would be able to bounce back from this disaster. However, “Japan is back.” Japan is indomitably recovering from the disaster and takes on a leading role in the world again.

In order to recover from this unparalleled complex disaster with the three overlapping elements of a large-scale earthquake, a “once-in-a-thousand-years” tsunami, and a nuclear accident, we have had to take on the challenges of implementing unprecedented initiatives. Reconstruction has moved forward steadily, as we have brought together the wisdom and intellect of those that have been affected by the disaster and local governments. I would like to thank everyone for the diverse types of support from home and abroad including companies and organizations outside of the disaster-affected areas.

The restoration of infrastructure, such as roads and ports, is almost complete. The number of people who have been uprooted from their homes has been reduced by about one-third to 160,000 people from a peak of 470,000.

This fiscal year will see the completion of much of the housing reconstruction efforts. We will step up our efforts in the revival of daily life so that those that have had to evacuate can move back into their homes as soon as possible and live safe and comfortable lives. For this reason, we must also promote the reconstruction of “software,” such as the mental and physical care of those affected by the disaster and the revival of industries and livelihoods, in addition to the reconstruction of “hardware”. We will promote the development of creative industrial reconstruction by borrowing the wisdom of everyone, with a focus on the tourism industry that has been incredibly impacted by negative reputational damage, as well as the seafood processing industry that has seen a delayed recovery in sales.

Reconstruction in Fukushima is also moving forward at a steady pace. Reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station are in cold shutdown, and work is progressing to decommission the plant. There are also

recent movements to integrate new industries along the Pacific coast and create international research cities and renewable energy regions. Radiation doses in the air within an 80-km radius from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station have also decreased by 65% over the past five years. With the exception of areas with high radiation doses, the government's policy is to lift the remaining evacuation orders over the next year. Going forward, we will continue decontamination work and to recover community infrastructure to create an environment where people who wish to return are able to come home again.

The five years of the "Reconstruction and Revitalization Period" will be a new stage towards the final completion of reconstruction in the earthquake and tsunami-affected areas, as well as the full-fledged reconstruction of Fukushima. During this period, it will be important to change the disaster-affected areas that are facing challenges, such as population decline, to areas that have

solved these problems, as models for regional revitalization. Initiatives for the future are being promoted from an industrial perspective as well, such as young fishermen trying to open up a path to the future for the fisheries industry that transcends areas and industry types, as well as cases in which challenges are being taken on in the development of advanced technologies, such as nursing care robots and wind power generation systems. New initiatives that started after the earthquake are being introduced at this forum and sessions. I hope that they will be of reference to everyone throughout the country.

We will also continue to promote efforts to address the “two issues” of fading memories of the disaster and remaining negative reputation. This year, in particular, we have taken advantage of the opportunities of hosting the G7 Ise-Shima Summit, as well as the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors’ Meeting in Sendai, and other ministerial meetings held recently to strengthen our international outreach. In addition to this forum, we will

work to strengthen information dissemination both within and outside of Japan during “Tohoku Reconstruction Month” this June, including the organization of the “Exchange Meeting in Tokyo: Featuring People creating a ‘New Tohoku’”.

From the perspective of the surge in inbound tourism nationwide, tourism in Tohoku has seen a significant delay. Therefore, we are strengthening initiatives to revitalize tourism by positioning this year as the first year for promoting tourism to Tohoku and significantly increasing tourism revitalization budgets.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has set an ambitious target of increasing the number of foreign guest nights in Tohoku to 1.5 million by 2020, three times as many as last year. By taking a nationwide approach, we will work to achieve this ambitious target with the combined strength of the national and local governments, as well as private businesses.

No reconstruction of Tohoku, no revitalization of Japan. Meticulous efforts must be promoted by multiple parties, including private companies, NPOs, and volunteers both in and outside of Japan, as well as the government. The fact that there are so many people in attendance at this symposium today is a great encouragement to us engaged in reconstruction efforts, as well as the people in Tohoku. I would like to encourage you all to visit the disaster-affected areas. Doing so will also help support the reconstruction of the region. Thank you very much for your continued support.

Lastly, I would like to say a few words about the earthquake that occurred in Kumamoto Prefecture. This earthquake caused enormous human and material damages on the area. I would like to offer my condolences and sympathy to those suffered from the disaster. I believe that the lessons from the Great East Japan Earthquake and reconstruction efforts will be helpful in the efforts for reconstruction and recovery from this earthquake as well,

and I hope that this forum will also aid in the area's recovery. With these words, I would like to conclude my remarks.

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