

Remarks by Consul-General Kiya Masahiko
East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami 10th Commemoration: JCS Rainbow Project
11 March 2021

Mr Robert McNeil, Assistant Commissioner, Fire and Rescue NSW

Ms Hirano Yukiko, Rainbow Project, Japan Club of Sydney

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Ten years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake struck Japan on 11 March 2011. The tsunami that followed the earthquake off the north-east coast of Japan's main island caused horrific damage to communities on Tohoku's coast. More than 20,000 people were killed or are still missing.

My thoughts and prayers are with the victims of the disaster.

In the immediate aftermath and the months that followed, Japan received overwhelming support from friends around the world, including from the Australian government and people.

In the initial response, a 76 member Urban Search and Rescue team was deployed to Japan from Australia. The team was led by Mr Robert McNeil. The Royal Australian Airforce C-17 aircraft that took the team from Australia remained in Japan, transporting vital stores and equipment to assist the humanitarian effort.

Then-Prime Minister Gillard's visit to the area in April 2011 was the first by any foreign leader and it too was a great source of strength for Japanese people.

On behalf of the Government of Japan, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the people of Australia for their support and friendship.

Thank you.

In the years since the disaster, there has been continuing exchange between Japan and Australia born out of these heartfelt efforts to assist friends in a time of need.

The young people of Tohoku have been a focus, and Rainbow Project's homestay program bringing young people from Fukushima to Sydney is a wonderful example.

Thank you to Rainbow Project and all the Project's supporters for everything you have done over the last 10 years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to assure you that while there is still work to be done, much progress has been made in the affected areas of Tohoku.

Reviving industry and livelihoods has been key. The areas affected were long known for their agriculture and fisheries. Already, 94% of farmland has been recovered, and 97% of fishery processing facilities have opened.

Throughout the process of reconstruction, food safety has been paramount.

Together with other countries around the world, Australia has recognised that Japanese food products are safe. Indeed, Japanese food products have passed the most stringent tests before reaching domestic and international markets.

Looking ahead, please come and visit Tohoku.

Tohoku looks forward to welcoming people from abroad to come and enjoy all that the region has to offer. This will help to further energise Tohoku's future.

Once COVID-19 is overcome and international travel resumes, I hope many Australians will take the opportunity to visit this beautiful part of Japan.

And Japan is determined to share what it has learnt from the disaster and make contributions to disaster management.

During the recent Black Summer bushfires in Australia, Japan sent two C130 aircraft to assist with the operations. As Colonel Ota Masashi of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force explained, "We never forget what Australia did at that time" when disaster struck Tohoku.

Australian Air Commodore Carl Newman said that Japan's contribution to the bushfire effort was a "reflection of friendship".

In the spirit of friendship, together, Australia and Japan can contribute much to disaster management in the Indo-Pacific and around the world.

As we reflect today, let us look forward to the future, inspired by the strength and resilience of the people of Tohoku.

Thank you.