

**Remarks by His Excellency Mr Shigekazu Sato**

**Ambassador of Japan to Australia**

**at the commemorative ceremony for the anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake**

**Tuesday, 13 March 2012**

The Honourable Dr Craig Emerson, Minister for Trade and Competitiveness, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs,

The Honourable Mr Peter Slipper, Speaker of the House of Representative,

The Honourable Ms Julie Bishop, Deputy Leader of the Opposition,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the very outset please allow me to express my sincere gratitude for your presence here with us today. The circumstances that have brought us together were marked by tragedy on an unprecedented scale, hence I would like to initiate proceedings by first asking you all to observe a moment of silence in memory of the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

One year ago on 11<sup>th</sup> March, an earthquake the size of which had not been experienced for a millennia struck the eastern seaboard of Japan, bringing with it chaos, calamity, and the terrifying spectacle of a tsunami devouring all before it. One year on, the number of dead and missing in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami stands at approximately 20,000.

Yet the tragic events of a year ago were compounded by the emergency at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima. The world waited with bated breath as the events in Fukushima unfolded before their eyes, although by December the Government was able to announce that the reactors had been brought to a condition equivalent to a

“cold shutdown” and the station stabilised. We are confident that the reactors and spent fuel pools are now under control.

In the meantime infrastructure and the economy in eastern Japan continues to progress along the road to recovery. Japan’s famed Shinkansen train lines and services have been fully restored, and all airports are now open and operating as per usual. Last week, I myself paid a visit to the disaster affected regions. I saw the areas severely hit by tsunami. Frankly speaking, I cannot say that these heavily damaged areas have fully recovered yet. This was much too big a disaster to recover fully in the space of a year. We still have many challenges. However, one thing is true. We are on the road to recovery. Apart from those areas that were completely destroyed by the tsunami, lifelines have been re-established in those communities that survived, and life is steadily returning to normal. I assure you that Japan is ready to welcome visitors from across the globe to conduct trade, study, or travel, and therefore extends an open invitation to all to come and experience the best of what Japan has to offer.

### **Overseas Assistance**

The response of the international community to the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear emergency was, not to mince any words, extraordinary. 163 countries and 43 international organizations offered their assistance.

Among them the assistance which came from Australia was particularly significant and played a direct part in disaster recovery operations. The provision of relief in coin and kind from the Australian government was generous in intent and application, and contributed greatly to alleviating the suffering of the people of the Tōhoku and north eastern provinces.

We have been joined today by General Hurley. I would like to thank the Australian Defence Force for the magnificent contribution that it made to relief efforts in the aftermath of the disaster, which were expertly coordinated with both the Japanese Self Defence Force and the US Forces in Japan.

Yet there was one specific form of support from the Australian government that stood out in minds of Japan's citizens. In spite of the continuing anxiety surrounding the state of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima and the level of devastation in the Tōhoku region, Prime Minister Julia Gillard courageously and with forthright resolution went ahead with her visit to Japan in late April of last year.

The significance of Ms Gillard's visit was not lost on the Japanese people, for as the first foreign leader to visit the disaster-stricken area, Ms Gillard's calm composure, her sympathy with the plight of the people of Minamisanriku and all of the devastated regions, and her assurances of support all served to ensure her place in the hearts of Japan's population.

This generosity of spirit was also matched by that which came from the people of Australia. At numerous fundraising events held throughout the country, Australians devoted their time to gathering donations to send to Japan. I believe that a number of people who made donations have joined us here today, hence on behalf of a grateful nation, please allow me to extend my thanks to you for all your generosity.

We have another guest with us today who personally witnessed the devastation in Japan. Scott Fardy, a member of the Brumbies rugby team, showed great generosity of spirit. He played with a famous Japanese rugby team in Iwate prefecture when the disaster happened. After the earthquake, he chose to stay there in order to help the local community in whatever way he could. To you, Scott, I personally want to say "arigato".

Another example of generosity came from right here in Canberra in the form of Melrose High School. Despite having to cancel their planned trip to Japan as a result of the disaster, the students decided that their money would be better spent in assisting schools affected by the tsunami. As I was scheduled to visit the disaster area, I presented a check on behalf of the students to representatives of the Board of Education of Rikuzentakata City in Iwate prefecture on 1<sup>st</sup> March.

Such gestures by those so young yet so imbued with generosity were mirrored by communities across Australia. These will remain poignant reminders of Australia's

concern for Japan during its time of need, and bodes exceptionally well for the future relations between our two nations.

### **Steps to Recovery**

Though the process of recovery will be long, incremental steps are being made which will contribute to Japan's long-term prosperity. The experience of the events in Fukushima convinced the Japanese government to reconsider its energy policy, hence a comprehensive review is currently underway to establish an optimum balance to ensure a safe, cost-effective, sustainable, and stable supply of energy for the future.

The lessons that were so cruelly taught by the earthquake and tsunami disaster will not be forgotten, and Japan has already committed itself to hosting a number of international conferences to examine how to better manage such disasters and promote a much more stringent degree of nuclear safety.

In response to the warm support extended from Australia and the world, Japan is resolved to contribute more positively to the challenges the international community now faces.

Many hopes and dreams disappeared on that fateful day, yet all was not lost, and the bonds of friendship, that sustained society then have in turn provided the foundation for the revitalisation of Japan and a much brighter future for all. Australia, and other countries, showed us a generosity in spirit and kind that only such ties can provide. It is for this that we, the representatives of the Japanese people, thank you, and long may our ties endure.