

A renewed determination for revitalization

By the Prime Minister of Japan, Yoshihiko Noda

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March 11 is a date now etched in Japan's collective consciousness. On the first anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, which triggered the starkest crisis our country has faced in a generation, we pause to commemorate all of those who suffered as a result of the tragedy. Our thoughts go out to all of the victims, and to people around the world whose lives have been devastated by natural disasters.

We will not forget the loved ones, friends and colleagues who were lost due to the disaster. Neither will we forget the outpouring of support and expressions of solidarity that Japan received from the international community. For this we feel deeply indebted and I take this opportunity to reiterate Japan's heartfelt appreciation.

Japan has made remarkable progress in responding to the disaster over the past twelve months. We renew our commitment to learn from the great difficulties we have faced. I firmly believe that this period of difficulty must, and indeed will, come to mark the start of a full-fledged revitalization of Japan.

In light of last year's tragedy, and the mood of national solidarity and sense of urgency that resulted, I am confident that we have the collective will to tackle our most pressing issues: reconstruction of areas affected by the March 11 earthquake, full decommissioning of the Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station and decontamination of affected areas, and revitalization of the Japanese economy.

Among the many steps taken over the past twelve months in response to the disaster has been the establishment of a budgetary and legislative framework that laid out many of the strategic tools for reconstruction. This included the establishment of the Reconstruction Agency, which now acts as control tower for all reconstruction planning and serves to significantly streamline and expedite activities, including the establishment of reconstruction grants and special reconstruction zones. In addition, procedures for monitoring and testing food products have been further strengthened, while state funds in excess of 1 trillion yen have been provided for the decontamination of residential areas close to the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant.

We recognize that the issues of greatest concern among affected individuals, and for our nation as a whole, are the most fundamental; job security and a sustainable livelihood for their family. Through the creation of special reconstruction zones and other initiatives under the concept of "open reconstruction," these regions will stimulate new investment from Japan and overseas, creating jobs, driving the restoration of existing industries and enhancing innovation.

The creation of a number of "FutureCities" throughout Japan, including in the disaster-hit municipalities of Ofunato, Rikuzentakata and Higashimatsushima, is one such example. Through budgetary, tax and regulatory measures, support will be provided to develop an industry and social infrastructure linked with compact cities and decentralized environmentally-friendly energy production, utilizing smart grids and

large scale solar and offshore wind farms. Japan is already a leader in the field of energy efficiency with a wealth of innovative technologies. Now is the time to put this expertise to use to create a new model for growth and sustainability that we can share with the world.

Another area where Japan can, and I believe must, lead the world and share its knowledge is in disaster risk reduction and response. We have learnt, in the harshest possible terms, that it is no longer acceptable to claim that events had been unforeseen. In order to build resilient communities and a country that is able to withstand natural disasters and is sustainable, disaster management measures are undergoing a comprehensive review and will be dramatically strengthened.

Of course, Japan also faces challenges that were apparent before last year's earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. Some, such as securing robust economic growth and rebuilding government finances, we have been tackling for a number of years. The longer these issues are left unresolved, the more serious they become.

Above all else, the promise that I have made to the Japanese people since becoming Prime Minister in September last year is that I will no longer tolerate the politics of indecision. A propensity to delay difficult and weighty decisions has been hurting our country, is detrimental to our economy, society and our future, and cannot be allowed to continue.

The many projects now underway for the reconstruction and revitalization of Japan constitute the first step toward the country's economic revival. With global economic uncertainty, historic appreciation of the yen and long-standing deflation, securing robust economic growth is a momentous challenge, but it is not insurmountable.

We must draw upon the unique strengths of the Japanese economy, seek an open and cooperative approach with our international partners, and intelligently exploit the promise of new growth areas. Sectors such as energy, the environment, health and nursing care hold significant potential as leading growth industries, where Japan can tap innovative ideas and investment from the private sector, including foreign direct investment, and play a leading role globally. We aim to create the conditions to support increased international interest and investment in Japan, not only from a business perspective, but also in the growth of tourism. As a prerequisite, we commit to providing timely and accurate information to the international community.

In recent history, Japan seized rapid economic expansion from the ashes and desolation of World War II, and built the most energy-efficient economy in the world in the aftermath of the oil shock. On the anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake we are reminded that we are now faced with a challenge of similar proportions. Our goal is not simply to reconstruct the Japan that existed before March 11, 2011, but to build a new Japan. This is an historic challenge and one that we are determined to overcome.

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