

## **2019 Sanriku Risk Reduction and Reconstruction Project An Outline of the Opening Ceremony**

Date: Saturday, June 1, 2019

Venue: Kamaishi Civic Hall TETTO, Hall A (Kamaishi City)

### **Program**

#### **Opening Remarks**

Takuya Tasso, Executive Committee Chairman of the 2019 Sanriku Disaster Risk Reduction and Reconstruction Project and the Governor of Iwate Prefecture

#### **Presentation: The State of Reconstruction**

Nobuhide Shiramizu, Director-General of the Iwate Prefecture Department of Policy and Regional Affairs

#### **Speech: Support from Abroad**

Joseph M. Young, Chargé d’Affaires at the U.S. Embassy

#### **Speech: The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami’s Impact on International Discussions Regarding Disaster Mitigation**

Yuki Matsuoka, Director at the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Office in Japan

#### **Presentation: The State of Reconstruction – Youth Efforts**

Tomoki Yoshihama, Graduate of the TOMODACHI Initiative Support Program

### **An Overview of the Speeches**

#### **Support from Abroad**

Joseph M. Young, Chargé d’Affaires at the U.S. Embassy

Although over eight years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster, I will never forget the tragic events of that day. In an instant, thousands of people lost their lives, homes, family members, and livelihoods.

The United States immediately reached out with an offer of support to the Japanese Government.

With Operation Tomodachi, the United States government assisted the Japan Self-Defense Forces and Japanese government agencies’ relief efforts. For many of the American service members and first responders who worked alongside the Self-Defense Forces and Japanese rescue workers after the disaster, the experience was the beginning of a lifelong friendship with the people of the affected areas. Firefighters and rescue workers from the Los Angeles and Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Departments in the United States have continued their friendship with their counterparts in Ofunato. They have shared stories of the brave heroes they met here in the Sanriku region with their communities in the United States. By passing along their experiences, they have honored those who were lost and raised awareness among Americans about the tsunami and the need to prepare for disasters.

And new friendships have emerged from the debris and devastation. In 2013, a training

boat—the *Kamome*— belonging to Takata High School in Rikuzentakata, Iwate, washed up on the shores of Crescent, California, a city that once suffered serious damage itself when it was struck by a tsunami triggered by the largest earthquake ever recorded in North America. After a group of local high school students and volunteers arranged to return it to its home in Japan, the two cities decided to establish sister school and sister city relationships.

Also, I am delighted to see participants here today who participated in TOMODACHI Initiative programs. TOMODACHI is a public-private partnership funded by Japanese and American donors, which focuses on developing human capital through leadership programs as well as educational and cultural exchanges. Over 7,800 Japanese and American youth have participated in TOMODACHI programs since the initiative began in 2011. Young people from the Tohoku region have accounted for over half of the participants and around 1,000 participants have come from Iwate Prefecture. These young people have gained valuable leadership skills that will prepare them to thrive in an increasingly global society. Just as importantly, TOMODACHI participants from the Tohoku area have shared their memories of the disaster with their new American friends. They have returned to their communities with a sense of pride and high aspirations for the future.

Over the past two days, I have had the opportunity to visit the cities of Rikuzentakata, Ofunato, and Kamaishi to observe up close the dramatic progress in the reconstruction of this region. I have been truly impressed by the region's new roads, buildings, and infrastructure, which are critical to Tohoku's revitalization. Above all, I've been most inspired by the people I've met during my visit – those still rebuilding their lives, even though their homes and families have been forever changed, those supporting their communities, even though the disaster left them with almost nothing, and those who have created and led innovative programs to make their cities welcoming, inclusive places for everyone. I am confident that overseas visitors who travel here for the Rugby World Cup and 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will also be inspired by the region's reconstruction and the resilience of the people they meet.

The United States has much to learn from Japan's experiences about disaster preparedness and risk reduction. I appreciate your efforts to ensure the lessons of 3.11 are passed on to future generations and shared with friends in other countries, including the United States. By sharing your knowledge, you are saving lives. I look forward to further deepening disaster preparedness cooperation between our countries in the coming years.

#### How the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami's influenced the International Discussions on Disaster Risk Reduction

Yuki Matsuoka, Head of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Office in Japan

I would like to talk about how the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami has influenced international discussions on disaster risk reduction, and in doing so, I wish to convey

the importance of sharing your experiences of the disaster and the on-going reconstruction efforts with the international community.

The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) is the United Nations' focal point for disaster risk reduction. One of the major roles of the UNDRR is to coordinate the international process to develop a global framework for disaster risk reduction which would facilitate countries to take actions on disaster risk reduction. The UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction played critical roles for the purpose. The UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction has been held three times to date—first in 1994, then in 2005. Most recently, the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held in March 2015 in Sendai, Japan, culminating in the adoption of the Sendai Framework, a fifteen-year international guideline to promote disaster risk reduction by the year 2030.

Discussions leading up to the adoption of the Sendai Framework lasted for more than one year, and were largely influenced by the experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Three keywords for the framework are Inclusivity, Resilience and All-of-Society Engagement.

Inclusivity emphasizes the need to implement disaster risk reduction strategies and policies that meet the diverse needs of a diverse community. This community may include people with disabilities, the elderly, children, young persons, women, men and people with different perspectives on gender. In sharing their experience, challenges and lessons learnt from the Great East Japan Earthquake and on-going recovery processes, the people of Tohoku contributed to an enhanced recognition by the international community of the importance of inclusivity, which is strongly reflected in the Sendai Framework.

Then there is Resilience, which emphasizes not only building resilience from structural measures but building resilience from non-structural measures also, such as those which are implemented by education and awareness-raising activities. Finally, All-of-Society Engagement emphasizes not only an awareness of the most vulnerable members of society to be considered, but also an awareness of how such people can become powerful actors in disaster risk reduction efforts. After all, the vulnerable are not solely defined by their weaknesses, as they can greatly contribute to bringing about change, raising awareness and improving disaster risk reduction efforts in their society. Emphasizing the concept of All-of-Society Engagement within the Sendai Framework, the international community once again reflected the experiences of women, children, young persons and persons with disabilities, all of whom have played a part in the recovery and reconstruction efforts from the massive disaster in Tohoku.

The experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake has also made clear the importance of private sector contributions. This is highlighted by the many roles undertaken by the private sector both in the aftermath of the disaster and throughout the recovery process.

The UNDRR has worked tirelessly to share Japan's experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake—its lessons, challenges and good practices—with the international community. Of course, there are lessons to be learned outside of Japan also, and by sharing these lessons, we are helping to set policy and improve capacity for disaster risk reduction, and build resilience around the world.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Head of UNDRR visited the Tohoku region many times, to speak directly to the people living there, and to ensure that their experiences would be shared with the international community and serve as a lesson for the world. The powerful messages that were heard in Tohoku brought new perspectives to the drafting process of the Sendai Framework, which was adopted at the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015 and was also endorsed by the UN General Assembly in the same year as a comprehensive international guideline for disaster risk reduction.

The UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was not merely attended by the delegations of the Member States of the United Nations, but also various stakeholders from around the world. Each country is requested to implement the Sendai Framework by the year 2030, and the task of the UNDRR is to support these countries for implementation and to monitor its progress.

While promoting implementation of the Sendai Framework, the UNDRR has made many visits to the Tohoku region, to know about the on-going recovery effort and challenges facing the communities there. Since 2011, for the past eight years, some people have certainly seen progress, while some others have also experienced many challenges including new ones which have taken years to develop, and other challenges which have been more psychological in nature. Nevertheless, the very fact that progress is being made has served as encouragement and a valuable lesson to other disaster-stricken communities around the world, such as those experienced by tsunamis in Indonesia, or by earthquakes, typhoons and cyclones in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Through advocacy efforts by using the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction designated by the UN, UNDRR has been encouraging people around the world to look at vulnerable people as not only in need of protection but also as potential actors contributing to resilient societies. These advocacy activities have also had a major effect on the contents of the Sendai Framework.

The UNDRR Office in Japan has reported many cases on the situation in Tohoku, one of which was referred in the Secretary-General's message for the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction 2012. It was about the activities of an NPO in Iwate Prefecture that was set up to support single mothers in Iwate Prefecture.

I previously mentioned how the contributions of the private sector are well-reflected in the Sendai Framework. This is in part contributed by the 2013 publication of a collection of good practices related to the public sector contributions to disaster risk reduction in Japan during and after the Great East Japan Earthquake. This publication was appreciated and read around the world, and brought attention to the significant contributions of the private sector.

At this time, I would like to share a few words from Ms. Mami Mizutori, the current Head of the UNDRR, and her predecessor who served as the Head of UNDRR until 2015, Ms. Margareta Wahlström—two individuals who have made many visits to the Tohoku region over the past eight years. Both quotations are taken from interviews that they had with a media

reporter during their visits to areas afflicted by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

“I have learned that the psychological recovery is important, and that it takes time. When the people of Tohoku spoke to me about their painful experiences, I could feel that they wanted them to serve as lessons to learn. Their messages will lead to build back better and enhance disaster risk reduction around the world, which I hope will be illuminating for the international community.”

“During my visits to the affected areas, I have learnt directly from the people involved such as local governments and citizens. Learning from them is crucial for the world, because that information is not only useful for Japan, but also for other countries during similar situations. The lessons learnt from and reconstruction process in Tohoku after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 as well as Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake 1995 are useful for global learning on DRR, since Japan has many years of knowledge and expertise accumulated in managing disaster risks and major disasters”.

Lastly, it must be said that the challenges being tackled by the UN represent challenges that are faced by the people all over the world. In fact, there are many challenges being addressed by the UN that should be familiar to you as well, such as disaster risk reduction issues. Please be encouraged to share your experiences and knowledge with the international community. In fact, I believe that sharing your experiences and knowledge is one of the objectives of the Sanriku Risk Reduction and Reconstruction Project. Please join the global efforts on disaster risk reduction and contribute to moving one step forwards by reducing the number of precious life being lost in a disaster. We at the UNDRR will continue to devote ourselves as a facilitator or a bridge between various local efforts and the global efforts in disaster risk reduction.

I sincerely hope that this presentation has been an opportunity for you to become familiar, even a little, with what we do at the UN, and to understand that by sharing your experiences with us, the people in Tohoku are contributing to disaster risk reduction efforts and actions around the world through the UN processes.

### The State of Reconstruction — Youth Efforts

Tomoki Yoshihama, Graduate of the TOMODACHI Initiative Support Program

I would like to talk to you about a disaster that changed my life.

I was born in 1998, in Miyako City. When I was five, my parents enrolled me in a traditional drum band called Yamaguchi Taiko. It was through performing at local festivals that I learned the true meaning of “community spirit”. Then, on March 11, 2011, my community was rocked by the Great East Japan Earthquake. It was the day before my elementary school graduation. As I lived about five kilometers from the coast, I did not have to experience the devastation of a tsunami. I did not lose any family members or relatives or friends. A week after the earthquake hit, when I was asked to help a family friend clean the mud of out their store, I

remember seeing a 20-meter long fishing boat jutting out of different store, but it didn't really register with me on a personal level.

I started thinking about the disaster and reconstruction in earnest after I entered high school. I had five really good friends in my class, and three of them told me that they had lost their homes to the earthquake and tsunami. Two of them told me that they had lost their fathers. I felt something then that I have not forgotten since. I also realized that I had done nothing to support the reconstruction effort. So on the advice of my older brother, I joined Miyakko Base, a local NPO dedicated to encouraging young people to help rebuild their communities.

It was then that I met some high school students who were one or two years older than myself. They made maps for local commercial districts and gave tours to students from both inside and outside the prefecture. Inspired to contribute to my hometown, I set up a high school group.

The first thing we did was hold a music festival. There were 30 of us in the group, all high school students, and another 30, also high school students, who liked what we were doing and said that they wanted to volunteer. When it came to sourcing talent, we received applications from more than 200 students, of all ages, willing to perform at our event. This was a young persons' affair—that is to say, the organization, performances, hosting, sound and lighting were all, to a certain extent, done by young persons. And when the day of the festival finally arrived, we counted more than 400 people in attendance. After that, our group set into motion all sorts of projects. We ran a high school cafeteria that used only locally-sourced ingredients, and organized disaster-prevention guided tours to local springs. We also made and sold T-shirts with designs inspired by our city, Miyako.

My desire to do something special for my community must have rubbed off on my fellow high school students, for we kept growing as a group. Eventually, I handed the reigns over to someone younger and signed up for Softbank's TOMODACHI Initiative. The TOMODACHI Initiative is a three-week long study program focused on community service and leadership at the University of California, Berkley. Participants are asked to think up possible solutions to local community problems and, finally, to come up with an action plan for tackling challenges in one's own hometown.

When I came back to Japan, I had developed an interest in regional education. This interest naturally expanded to include the broader Japanese education system, overseas education systems and education systems in general.

Then, in the autumn of my last year of high school, two weeks before I was set to graduate, I dropped out of school. The reason is that I wanted to study at a high school overseas. So I didn't really drop out—I just put my graduation on hold. Then I looked for a potential overseas school to host me, and I sent off ten or so emails. One of the replies I received was particularly favorable, so I filled out the necessary paper work and was admitted.

In the United States, school starts in the fall, so I had lots of time to prepare. Before leaving, I decided that I wanted to see more of my own country, so I picked up some part-time work and traveled around. Also, seeing as I needed to work on my English, I took a one-month

long intensive English course in the Philippines. Finally, in the autumn of 2017, I began my overseas study at the Youth Initiative High School in Wisconsin.

But my time overseas was not at all what I expected it to be. When I arrived, the principal at my high school asked me to join a research team dedicated to building a new university. I only ever spent seven or eight hours at school each week, which was the bare minimum I needed to graduate—the rest of my time was spent as a researcher, designing a curriculum and school system. I also participated in local community events. Looking at education from multiple perspectives, I learned much about the differences between Japanese and American education. After about ten months of study, I converted my school and research credits and was allowed to graduate. I returned home to Japan last summer.

Before I studied in the United States, I was torn between going to university overseas and looking for work in my own city. Ultimately, I chose to return home. It was studying abroad that taught me the value of my own hometown. And as soon as I returned, I began working for the NPO Miyakko Base.

However, while thinking about my future, I began to worry about only working in my hometown. Then an opportunity arose for graduates of Softbank's TOMODACHI Initiative, and I interned for six months at Softbank's headquarters, in their CSR department. Last fall, I was spending half the week in Tokyo, contributing to society through a major corporation, and the other half of the week I was in Miyako, working for an NPO.

Needless to say, all this running around was not easy on my wallet or my physical wellbeing. And yet I was doing what I wanted to be doing. I got used to my schedule and in December started working at MYSH Sake Bar in Tokyo as a junior manager. The bar serves food and Japanese liquors made with ingredients from Miyako. It is a place where I can really be myself, and I enjoy working as a young manager.

In March, my contract with Softbank ended, and in April I was hired by Fireplace Inc., a local developer. Specifically, I am in charge of putting up restaurants and event spaces in the Nihonbashi area.

I am now working three jobs: one is a staff position at Miyakko Base, the second is a managerial position at MYSH Sake Bar, and the third is a contract position at Fireplace, Inc. I have also begun restoring abandoned homes in Miyako, turning them into share-houses. This has been my life story up to now.

I am serious when I say that the Great East Japan Earthquake marked a turning point in my life. The support that I received from adults who were affected by the earthquake, the youth-assistance programs that were developed because of the earthquake, and many loving environments has changed me for the better. I will always be trying my hand at different things to repay the debt that I owe to my hometown.

As technology continues to become more and more advanced, the way we work and live is beginning to change. There seems to be so many things to choose from. And yet sometimes it feels like the things that are really important have lost something essential. It is at those times that I think about Iwate, a meeting-ground for new challenges and good-old tradition. I feel that

Iwate offers us a hint of what we can expect from Japan in the future.