

Message from Prime Minister Noda - One year on -

March, 2012

- On 11 March we reach the one-year anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. This disaster claimed the lives of almost 20,000 people, among whom were a number of foreign nationals. I would like to reiterate my prayers for the repose of the victims of the disaster and offer my condolences to their bereaved families.
- Since the disaster struck, Japan has received warm and generous offers of assistance from more than 160 countries and regions and over 40 international organizations. On behalf of the people of Japan I would like to express once again my appreciation for this assistance.
- In my opening statement, I would like to touch upon the current status and future challenges for Japan as we push forward with reconstruction efforts from the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Reconstruction of Disaster-affected Regions

- The infrastructure and economy of the disaster-affected regions are steadily recovering. The supply chain for the manufacturing sector has been completely restored. Production levels in the mining and manufacturing sector have now recovered to the levels prior to the disaster.
- More than 80 percent of disaster-affected local governments have completed the formulation of a “Reconstruction Plan,” which include ambitious targets to become “global models” for the introduction of renewable energies and development of hubs for advanced medicine. Through the realization of these plans, it is our aim to generate reconstruction-led demand in a tangible way.
- The ruling and opposition parties have made united efforts to draw up specific measures and have advanced these through to implementation. At the end of last year, the Government launched a system of Special Zones for Reconstruction, which provides special measures such as tax reductions and exemptions over a period of five years for companies newly establishing businesses in these zones. The bill that provides for temporary taxation increases to secure funding for reconstruction was also passed by the Diet. The Government has established the Reconstruction Agency as a new administrative body, and we are making concerted efforts to provide maximum support for measures in the disaster-affected regions.

Food Safety and Health Management

- At the end of last year I announced the achievement of a state of cold shutdown of the nuclear reactors, but the fight against the nuclear accident will continue until the reactors are decommissioned. We will continue to give first priority to food safety and the health management of residents in the vicinity of the power station.

- We have further strengthened the system of monitoring and testing of food products, which has been in place since directly after the disaster. From April this year it is planned that new standards will be introduced concerning regulation values of radioactive materials in food products, which are stricter than previously.
- State funds in excess of 1 trillion yen will be devoted to decontamination of living spaces in the areas around the nuclear power station. By April at the earliest we expect to be able to revise some of the designations of areas that are currently subject to entry restrictions and will continue to work to ensure that residents can return to their homes in the near term.
- It is the case that with the exception of a number of regulated areas, nearly all regions have returned to daily life as it was prior to the disaster. We hope that people will come to Japan for work, tourism and study with peace of mind. We would also greatly welcome investment from countries overseas, as partners in the reconstruction of the disaster-affected region.
- A natural prerequisite for all of these is therefore the provision of accurate and timely information to all countries. I would like to continue to request that import restrictions and travel advisories that remain in place in some countries are revised and relaxed, in view of the latest situation which is based on scientific evidence.

Contribution to the International Community

- To repay the kindness and assistance shown to Japan by the international community at the time of the disaster, I would like to assure you that Japan will not become inward looking and that we will continue to make an active international contribution to human security and sustainable global economic growth, utilizing such means as the dispatch of peacekeeping operations (PKO) and provision of Official Development Assistance (ODA).
- Above all, one of Japan's most important responsibilities is to share the knowledge and lessons gained from the disaster with the international community, and leave this body of knowledge to posterity. We seek to contribute to the international community, actively providing information in such areas as enhancement of nuclear safety and disaster prevention measures. That concludes my opening statement.