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Japanese American Leaders Travel to Tokyo to Meet with NGO Leaders and Determine Next Steps

Three months after the earthquake and tsunami, Japan begins its transition from the immediate relief and recovery stage to the long-term rebuilding stage that will greatly impact the future of the country. “Japan will accomplish great things on its road to recovery,” said U.S. Ambassador to Japan, John V. Roos at the U.S.-Japan Council’s Japan Leadership Symposium earlier this month. “The steps forward will not be easy and it will be a long journey but the power, spirit and hope has inspired us all over the last 80 days and rest assured that the U.S. will be there for Japan, wherever, whenever.”

The Japan Leadership Symposium: “Defining a New Paradigm for U.S.-Japan Relations” was attended by 350 leaders in the business, government, media and non-profit sectors including a delegation of Japanese Americans who serve as Board Members or Council Members on the U.S.-Japan Council. The event was also a part of a newly defined public-private partnership outlined by Secretary Hillary Clinton and Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto.

The Council has raised more than \$2.5 million for earthquake relief and recovery to date and has been disbursing funds exclusively to Japanese Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). While in Japan, the U.S.-Japan Council delegation met with leaders of these organizations in order to assess the current state of the affected Tohoku region and to determine next steps. Several members of the delegation, including USJC President Irene Hirano Inouye were able to visit the region and participate in volunteer activities.

At a formal breakfast meeting, Kensuke Onishi of Civic Force and Peace Winds Japan advocated that the time has come to go beyond the distribution of goods to tactics that will jump start local economies including the creation of social funds in collaboration with local banks, small-medium enterprise (SME) banking and private sector support.

Leaders on both sides of the Pacific believe the rebuilding process is an opportunity to build back an even better Japan using innovative, global solutions. “I look upon the disaster as an opportunity to demonstrate a strong U.S.-Japan relationship and how close our relationship truly is,” said Senator Daniel K. Inouye who serves on the U.S.-Japan Council Board of Councilors. “It is also a chance to help restore Japan to its greatest potential.”

Hitachi Chairman Takashi Kawamura reinforced this message, providing the business perspective: “The economic recovery of Japan cannot occur without the recovery of the Northeast region, and such activities apply the latest and cutting-edge technology for safety, comfort and ecological city planning in regions and communities.”

But in order to sustain the next stages of relief and rebuilding, Japan will require continued funding from its partners around the world. The NGO leaders met with in Tokyo by the U.S.-Japan Council delegation expressed immense gratitude for the outpouring of support from Americans. A recent contribution of \$200,000 from famed tenor Placido Domingo and Los Angeles Opera Vice Chairman Sebastian Musco helped the U.S.-Japan Council Earthquake Relief Fund cross the \$2 million mark, and the thousands of individual donors have demonstrated the grassroots support for Japan and the Japanese people.