

May 19th Joint Press Conference: Opening statement

Reconstruction Minister Tsuyoshi Takagi

(May 19, 2016, 15:45-16:20 Sendai International Center)

(Introduction)

My name is Tsuyoshi Takagi and I am the Minister for Reconstruction. Welcome to Japan and Miyagi Prefecture.

Miyagi Prefecture belongs to areas that were severely damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake which occurred five years ago on March 11, 2011. And the Tohoku region, which includes Miyagi Prefecture, has often been referred to as the origin of Japan, as many artifacts and ruins from the Jomon period, which is further before B.C.2000, have been unearthed here.

“Homeland” has special meanings to the Japanese people. Japanese government is making utmost efforts towards reconstruction so that people who have lost their homes as a result of the tsunami or earthquake and people that have moved away from their homes as a result of the nuclear disaster can restore the homeland.

Today, I would like to talk about the following three points:

- The first is the steady progress of reconstruction from the earthquake.
- The second is our hope that many visitors from overseas will visit the Tohoku region.
- The third is our efforts to ensure food safety.

(Current situation of reconstruction efforts)

As evidenced from the large earthquake in Kumamoto last month, Japan is an earthquake-prone country. Of all the earthquakes that have occurred in the country, the Great East Japan Earthquake was a complex disaster that had three major elements: a massive earthquake, a “once-in-a-thousand-years” tsunami, and a nuclear accident.

Recovery from this type of unprecedented earthquake disaster is a large-scale and difficult process. However, with national and international support, as well as the own efforts of people that have been affected, reconstruction efforts are steadily gaining

speed. Here again, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude for the tremendous support received from the G7 member countries. Restoration of infrastructure, such as roads and railways, is mostly complete. The number of people who live away from their original homes has decreased from its peak of 470,000 to close to a third, less than 170,000. However, since there are still people who have been unable to return to their homes, we will focus more on rebuilding housing.

We are focusing on “hardware” restoration, such as for infrastructure, as well as “software” reconstruction, in particular, the revitalization of industry and livelihood. One of my favorite foods is oysters. Recently, the oyster farms in Minamisanriku Town in Miyagi Prefecture have received international certification as a sustainable aquaculture industry that has a low impact on the environment. The places that have been damaged by the earthquake were originally areas with thriving fishing and marine product processing industries. We are moving ahead with our efforts to revive these traditional industries and create new industries to support the revitalization of the economy.

(Revival of Fukushima)

The situation in Fukushima is, unfortunately, different from that in Iwate and Miyagi. However, the size of the area that has been affected by the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station and in which residents have been given evacuation orders is 7% of the prefecture, which, if we look at the entire area of Japan, accounts for 0.3%. In other areas, people are enjoying daily lives.

Nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station are in cold shutdown and efforts for decommissioning the plant is in progress. We are also seeing steady progress with contaminated water management. Any impacts from contaminated water have been completely blocked off inside the port of the power station.

There has been a new movement in Fukushima to try to create an international research city by concentrating new industries that utilize robots in the Pacific Ocean coastal areas, as well as to create an area for renewable energies, such as hydrogen and biomass.

I had an opportunity to visit an *anime* (animation) production company in Miharu Town in Fukushima Prefecture that uses an abolished school. *Anime* is a sub-culture of which Japan is proud, and as an oasis for *anime*, Miharu is expected to become a town where young people will gather.

With the exception of some areas where radiation doses remain high, the policy of the national government is to lift the remaining evacuation orders in the prefecture within a year. We will continue with decontamination efforts and infrastructure improvement to create an environment that allows people to return to their homes if they wish.

The impacts from the nuclear accident have eased and air radiation doses in Fukushima Prefecture have decreased 65% over these past five years. The air radiation doses in many of the places in the prefecture are almost at the same level as in cities in other countries, including Nahara Town, which is located close to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station and has just seen evacuation orders lifted. I think that many of you still remember the vivid image of the accident from five years ago; however, the situation has changed dramatically. I hope that you will see the current status directly with your own eyes.

(Revival of Tourism)

Japan is currently experiencing an unprecedented inbound tourism boom, as the number of foreign tourists to Japan in the last fiscal year topped 20 million. However, unfortunately, this momentum has yet to reach the Tohoku region. I believe that it is important to have many foreign tourists visit Tohoku in order to further build up disaster-stricken areas.

Based on this idea, the national government has named this year the “First Year of Tohoku Tourism Recovery.” Tohoku’s appeal from the 6 prefectures, including affected and non-affected areas, is vast and includes the World Cultural Heritage sites of Hiraizumi in Iwate Prefecture, snow festival in Ōuchi-juku in Fukushima Prefecture, and the Akiu hot springs, which will be the venue of the meeting tomorrow, and other hot

springs. I would like all of the journalists here to visit the Tohoku region and to let your readers/viewers know the appeals of Tohoku.

(Food safety and security)

Some people may have concerns about food products from the Tohoku region, especially Fukushima. However, we are conducting inspections for radiation on food products based on the most stringent standards in the world. Inspections on rice from Fukushima Prefecture are carried out for each and every bag of rice. Only those products which pass these strict inspections are put on the market and exported overseas. Over the past year, all rice and seafood products have passed inspections, and all meat, vegetables, and fruits have passed inspections for the past three years. We have prepared food samples from Fukushima, Miyagi, and Iwate prefectures at IMC, where your workspace is located. I hope you will enjoy tasting the foods from Tohoku. Although there are still some countries that place regulations on the import of food products from Japan, we will never compromise on food safety.

(Conclusion)

Without reconstruction of Tohoku, Japan cannot revive. In 2019, Japan will host the Rugby World Cup and some matches will be held in Kamaishi City in Iwate Prefecture. In 2020, the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games will be held in Japan. In anticipation of these opportunities that will draw international attention to Japan, we will accelerate our reconstruction efforts to build a “New Tohoku.” I hope that many people from around the world, including all of you present today, will see revitalized Tohoku and how much more productive and prosperous Japan has become. I would appreciate your continuous support for the reconstruction of Japan.

Thank you very much.