

(As delivered)

Disasters and Resilience
Remarks at JICA/Friends of Europe Event
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Madam Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva,
Ambassador Kojiro Shiojiri,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to speak at this important event commemorating the catastrophe that struck northern Japan two years ago today, and I would like to thank the co-organizers, JICA and the Friends of Europe, for this kind invitation.

During my past diplomatic career I was involved in the kind of issues we are taking up this afternoon -- disasters, humanitarian work, development, and resilience. This includes serving as head of OCHA and Emergency Relief Coordinator and as UN Coordinator of International Support for Chernobyl victims, under then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and latterly as deputy to Mrs. Sadako Ogata at JICA.

Here in Brussels I remember the consultations OCHA used to have with the European Commission's -- ECHO, which allowed me to appreciate its extensive and excellent humanitarian work around the world and I would like to pay my respect to ECHO for its continued dedicated efforts.

I would also like to take the opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the European Commission and in particular Commissioner Georgieva for the kind support and heart-warming solidarity extended to the Japanese people during the difficult time.

Now I would like to explore the issues of natural disasters and resilience and

then say a few words about the Fukushima nuclear accident.

(Natural disasters)

Natural disasters, particularly extreme weather events, are becoming more frequent and violent. Human and economic costs are rising at an alarming rate.

A recent UNISDR report estimated that during the past decade alone, 1.1 million people died, 2.7 billion people suffered from the effects of natural disasters globally and the economic bill was an astonishing \$1.3 trillion.

Climate change plays a significant part no doubt. A report from the Spanish NGO, DARA, led by my former OCHA colleague, Mr. Ross Mountain, estimated that in 2010 alone global GDP was reduced by nearly 1% or some 700 billion dollars because of the adverse effects of climate change.

Faced with such alarming developments, the world community – the UN, the World Bank, regional organizations, individual states, NGOs and civil societies – has begun to respond. But clearly, far more needs to be done, and more speedily, if we are to meet these challenges in time.

Japan takes these matters seriously not least because it is one of highly disaster-prone country. Sitting astride a major seismic zone and a typhoon corridor in the western Pacific, it is exposed to earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, volcanic eruptions, floods, landslides, and other disasters. It is said that about 10% of the world's big earthquakes occur in or near Japan.

Some 80 years ago famed Japanese physicist and writer, Torahiko Terada, warned:

“There is one thing that Japanese people must never ever forget – that because of its unusual geographic position and moreover due to its very peculiar climatic and geophysical circumstances, the landmass they inhabit is destined to be constantly exposed to the threats of extraordinary natural events and hazards.”

Indeed, throughout history we Japanese have endured heavy sacrifices and losses. But we have learned to live with natural calamities and then moved on.

Many of our neighbors in Asia suffer similar unfortunate experiences. After all, the Asian region accounts for around 40% of all large-scale global disasters and 60% of disaster related deaths.

So we in Japan attach a high importance, domestically, to disaster policy and building disaster resilient society and, internationally, to disaster-related humanitarian assistance and development aid. Our accumulated lessons learned, relevant expertise and the resources we can deploy can now help others in their own disaster response, preparedness, risk reduction as well as post-disaster recovery and reconstruction.

Therefore, JICA as the implementing agency of Japan's official development assistance has assigned a high priority to disaster-related projects and programs, not only in Asia but around the world.

Japan is also closely involved in various multilateral setting, through the U.N. and other organizations and regional mechanisms such as ASEAN.

The office of UNISDR, under the leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Margareta Wahlstrom, plays a key part, and Japan is working very closely with it to establish a new regime following the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action for disaster reduction.

Also important are such processes as the Global Platform meeting in Geneva later this year, and the third UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction two years from now, to be held in Japan. It is vital that such platforms and processes will lead to decisions for effective action by all stakeholders.

In this regard, I would like to recall the outcome of the "World Ministerial Conference on Disaster Reduction in Tohoku", held last July in a region directly affected by the devastation two years ago.

At this conference in Tohoku more than 60 countries, many international organizations, local governments, the private sector and civil societies explored ways to build shape societies more resilient to disasters and the following salient aims emerged from the discussions there:

- Human security should be the basis of resilient societies;
- Achieve long-term economic investment in disaster reduction;
- Strengthen the capacity of developing countries and increase the availability of funds for disaster reduction and recovery;
- Mainstream disaster reduction in development and at every level of public policy by prioritizing it, and ensure adequate governance mechanisms and financial resources;
- Incorporate disaster reduction as a major element in a post-MDG (Millennium Development Goals) framework;
- Strengthen regional cooperation including establishing early warning systems and conducting joint disaster needs assessment, recovery planning and trainings as practiced in the Asia-Pacific region.

In my view, these are all essential points and they should be reflected in the future post-MDG scheme and in the final outcome of the third UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2015.

In these efforts, I believe there is a lot of potential for cooperation between JICA and European partners, in particular ECHO. For example, ECHO's "community managed disaster risk reduction" approach is one that JICA can easily associate with. Both sides agree on the need of mainstreaming disaster into the development agenda and of promoting capacity building in risk management. In this regard, Mr. Aiichiro Yamamoto, JICA's regional representative based in Brussels and a highly motivated person, stands ready to engage with ECHO and other European partner, and I wish him well and a success.

(Fukushima accident)

In this commemorative event it would be remiss of me if I did not say a few words about the Fukushima nuclear accident and its lessons.

A Magnitude 9 earthquake and 15-meter high or higher tsunami ravaged the coasts and caused nearly 20,000 dead or missing, mostly from the tsunami. Several nuclear plants on the coasts fell prey to this savage assault of Nature, resulting in a severe complex disaster of the kind the world had never experienced before.

At the Fukushima Daiichi plant, the loss of all electric power – what experts call an SBO (station black out) – was followed by a fatal failure of safety and cooling systems, fuel meltdowns, and hydrogen explosions, resulting in the release of large amounts of radioactive substances into the atmosphere.

The calamity forced the immediate evacuation of more than 160,000 local residents and widespread economic, social, environmental and health crises ensued, and these effects are continuing today.

Many questions have been raised:

- What went wrong and why?
- Was the Fukushima accident preventable?
- What are the important lessons to be learned?
- Why did Japan, a country known for earthquakes and tsunamis, choose nuclear power development in the first place?
- What's going to happen to the existing 50 plants shut down since the accident.... so on, and so forth.

Several accident investigation reports came out. They acknowledged that the accident was triggered by natural causes, nevertheless highlighted a number of fundamental organizational and systemic failures and weakness as important contributing factors, in other words, “human error” factors as no less responsible. In this sense the disaster was characterized as “manmade”.

In other words, the stakeholders – utilities, regulators, site communities and other supporting interest groups – embraced, unwittingly or not, a misguided premise that has come to be referred to in Japan as “nuclear safety mythology”. This is a mindset which essentially portrayed nuclear power plants as both safe and free of risk and this hindered a sound safety

culture, bred negligence and a failure to face up to the true risks involved.

In such a negligent environment, problems were bound to fester:

- Lack of preparedness, particularly governing severe accident measures,
- Lack of regulatory independence,
- Collusion between regulators and operators,
- Failure to meet international safety standards and to learn from good practices of other countries, etc.

One can argue that if a solid sound nuclear safety culture had been in place and appropriate protective measures had been taken accordingly, the plants at Fukushima could have withstood the effects of the earthquake and tsunami and the accident averted, or at least its impact mitigated.

Maybe so, but unfortunately such was not the case. Fukushima has been a painful and costly “wake-up call”, and for this failure Japan has had to pay a heavy price indeed.

Inevitably, the shock of Fukushima has sharply divided public opinion on the nation’s nuclear and energy policy. And Japan currently faces the highly sensitive question of what to do with the existing 50 nuclear power plants across the country, all of which, excepting two of them, have been shut down for reasons of renewed safety concerns or for political reasons in the wake of the accident,

We are now in the middle of crafting a set of new nuclear safety standards and regulations within the newly created regulatory body, Nuclear Regulation Authority, of which I am a Commissioner. Restarting the idled plants – which ones and under what sort of conditions – will have to be determined in the next months and years in light of the new safety standards and regulations.

The Fukushima accident has impacted some other countries such as Germany and Italy, but globally it seems certain the overall number of nuclear power plants will increase considerably in future, particularly in countries like Korea, China, Vietnam, India and others, implying increased

potential accident risk.

There is also a mounting concern about possible nuclear terrorism and a subsequent threat to global security. Next year 2014 a third World Nuclear Security summit is going to be held in the Netherlands, following the first one in Washington and the second in Seoul, to address this issue.

In those circumstances, Japan, which has been the third nuclear power after the US and France, must be concerned not only with its own nuclear safety and security, but it should be actively involved in global nuclear safety and security issues, through sharing the Fukushima experience and lessons as well as sharing its relevant technology and knowhow with the international community.

Thank you.