

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

March 2021

March this year marks the 10th anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Ten years ago on that day, I was working in the United States. When I later arrived back at Narita Airport, smoke was everywhere, and I found the highway to Tokyo was closed.

We at the Consulate-General of Japan once again extend our heartfelt gratitude for the generous support received from the people of Ontario 10 years ago. We also felt it important to provide a report on the current state of reconstruction in the affected areas.

I therefore would like to start by taking this opportunity to thank the countless people who provided support after the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011.

Among them was the Tiger Jeet Singh Foundation founded and operated by Mr. Tiger Jeet Singh and his son, Mr. Tiger Ali Singh, who both met with tremendous success as professional wrestlers in Japan. Mr. Tiger Jeet Singh remains vivid in the memories of innumerable Japanese, including myself. However, I wonder how many realize that he now lives in Milton, Ontario. I am quite certain that the support his Foundation extended after the earthquake is not widely known. In recognition of its contributions toward deepening friendship with Japan, including its support of the relief efforts in 2011, I conferred the Consul-General's Commendation to the Tiger Jeet Singh Foundation on Feb. 25. During the conferment ceremony, Mr. Tiger Ali Singh announced that the Foundation will generously donate an additional \$20,000 in support children affected by the earthquake. The conferment was fortunately covered widely by media in both Japan and Canada so I was able to inform a lot of people about this story. These kinds of encounters are among the most pleasurable aspects of working abroad. I would like always to cherish my ties with such friends of Japan.



After the earthquake 10 years ago, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as a show of solidarity with Japan invited then Ambassador ISHIKAWA Kaoru to Queen's Park to address its members.



Photo credit: Embassy of Japan in Canada

Donations were also gathered by the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre from many individuals and organizations. We received a report on the use of these funds from the JCCC on the occasion of this 10th anniversary. Although there was also a meeting planned of students who received scholarships from these funds, this unfortunately had to be postponed to next year due to the pandemic.

Activities of the Support Our Kids (SOK) organization are also taking place in Toronto to aid children who suffered mental trauma because of the disaster. SOK's Toronto representative is Ms. Chako Setoyama. Among her many achievements in the last 10 years is the production in 2019 of a *tairyobata* (a fishing boat flag signalling a large catch) by Japanese and Canadian children. The flag was subsequently taken to Japan to cheer on the Canadian National Rugby Team participating in the Rugby World Cup that year. The flag's safe return to Toronto coincided with this 10th anniversary, and it is now on display at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital.



In order to express our gratitude to the many people in Ontario who extended support after the historical disaster, the Consulate-General of Japan placed an ad in the March 11 edition of the Toronto Star. We received generous messages from people who said they still wished to make donations for the affected areas even though 10 years have now passed.



COVID-19 infections are finally showing signs of decline, but numbers of new infections nonetheless remain high. While vaccines are expected to be more widely administered, it is still too early to let our guard down. I ask everyone to continue to adhere to necessary safety protocol and stay safe.



SASAYAMA Takuya
Consul-General of Japan