

**“Dialogue with Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida:
Delivering a Message to the World about the Attractiveness and the
Strong Recovery of Tohoku" Symposium**

Foreign Minister Kishida - Keynote Address

1. Opening

I am Fumio Kishida, the foreign minister of Japan. At the outset, I would like to offer my heartfelt gratitude to all the members of Tohoku University and Kahoku Shimpō for their joint sponsorship of this symposium.

I would also like to express my sincere concern for all those who were affected by the earthquake and tsunami that occurred in the Tohoku region yesterday morning.

And while an earthquake has just occurred, it was precisely the thought that supporting the recovery of the region is critical that brought me here to Miyagi Prefecture. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is promoting an array of initiatives to share the attractions of Japan with the world. Local regions in Japan hold a vast variety of appeal, uniqueness, and culture, and it is crucial to share those attractions with the world. Until now we have used the Iikura Guest House and overseas diplomatic missions for initiatives introducing regions in Japan to the world, but now I want to go one step further. I personally visit various regions with foreign ambassadors in Tokyo, exchange opinions with local people and share the attractiveness of the local areas with the world. This visit marks the start of a new project, “Local to Global,” to share the appeal of Japan’s regions with the world.

Today I will introduce the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ new initiative to share the appeal of regions in Japan with the world, “Diplomatic Action Plan to bring local areas to the world, and the world to local areas”

The “Diplomatic Action Plan” consists of the three pillars: (1) “Plan for the expansion of market channels for local goods”; (2) “Plan for the promotion of tourism to Japan”; and (3) “Plan for the promotion of international exchange.” Based on these three plans we will use an array of diplomatic tools to share the appeal of Japan’s regions with the world.

2. The Plan for the Expansion of Market Channels for Local Goods

The first pillar of our plan is “Plan for the Expansion of Market Channels for Local Goods.”

First of all, I will personally lead in selling exceptional regional products to the world. Until now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has held a number of receptions for foreign diplomatic corps in Tokyo and at diplomatic missions overseas to promote the appeal of Japan's regions in joint sponsorship with leaders of local government.

Additionally, with the slogan of "the most open diplomatic missions in the world," we will leverage our 215 worldwide diplomatic missions to promote the products of regional enterprises and regional agricultural and fishery products. Last year our diplomatic missions carried out approximately 2,500 activities in order to support promoting the products of Japanese companies. Our diplomatic missions will continue to carrying out a variety of promotions to boost that number to 5,000 activities by 2020.

Next year, the Japan House will be opened in the three major cities: London, Los Angeles and Sao Paulo. By leveraging the power of specialists in those cities and private sector, the Japan House will serve as a base to share the diverse array of Japan's charms through a message of All Japan. We will create a place where visitors can comprehensively experience Japan by "seeing," "hearing," "tasting" and "buying" all in one stop in the premier districts of major metropolises. Through promotions centered around traditions and values of various regions in Japan, we will aim to deliver Japan's regions to the world with even greater appeal and effectiveness. We will also seek to provide information with visitors who do not yet have an interest in Japan in addition to those who already have an interest in Japan.

Additionally, we will utilize Official Development Assistance (ODA) to support the overseas development of regional enterprises investing in the development of developing nations. The company at which today's panelist, Mr. Iwasa, CEO of the company, received ODA to support their business expansion in India. The locally grown strawberries sold to local luxury hotels are gaining popularity, and at the same time, a contribution is being made to job creation and elimination of poverty in India's rural areas.

The government will also strive head-on for lifting the import restrictions imposed on Japanese products after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The restrictions have already been eliminated in 19 countries, but are still maintained in a portion of countries and regions. For example, sea squirts harvested in Miyagi Prefecture cannot be exported to the Republic of Korea. While the issue is currently being deliberated at the WTO, the Ministry will also continue to lend its firm support. We will also work towards the elimination of restrictions by inviting the regulatory officials of nations enforcing import restrictions to Japan and carrying out activities such as visiting the food safety inspection centers located in the disaster-affected regions.

3. Plan for the Promotion of Tourism to Japan

The second pillar is “Plan for the Promotion of Tourism to Japan.” While the number of foreign tourists lodging in the six Tohoku prefectures has returned to pre-disaster levels, considering the overall number of foreign tourists to Japan has increased from 10 to 20 million people and in light of our goal of 40 million foreign tourists by 2020, we cannot rejoice simply at the number of tourists returning to pre-disaster levels. We must further increase the foreign tourists to the Tohoku region.

Based on that recognition, we will continue to proactively relax visa restrictions. For example, we have taken measures to issue multiple journey visas to individual Chinese tourists who lodge in one of the three prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima. We will continue to ease visa requirements strategically mainly in China, the Philippines, Vietnam, India, and Russia in order to increase repeat visitors to regions in Japan.

Up until now we have invited members of the foreign media, and the many charms of the Tohoku region have been broadcast to the world. A Philippine journalist shared Tohoku’s delicious delicacies by covering a strawberry farm in Yamamoto Town and the fisheries of Shiogama City, a Chinese journalist covered Lotus root soba noodles and Nanbu ironworks, an Indonesian journalist covered the historic townscape of Ouchi-juku and Fukushima’s hot springs, and more. In the past 5 years, 174 journalists and 11 television teams have covered the Tohoku region, and we will continue to promote visitations to the Tohoku region through these invitations.

We will also strive to disseminate the allure of the tourist spots in Japan’s regions by proactively leveraging our foreign diplomatic missions. In consideration of our view of the crucial importance of the economic exchange between Miyagi Prefecture and the northeastern region of China, Miyagi Prefecture established a local office in Dalian. At the Japan Tourism Exhibition jointly sponsored by the Consular Office of Japan in Dalian and JNTO (the Japan National Tourism Organization), the Miyagi Prefecture Government Dalian Office also opened a tourism booth.

We recognize that Ms Okuyama, the mayor of Sendai city, is proactively working to attract tourists from Thailand to Sendai, and as we will respond to the needs of municipalities one by one, we encourage the further proactive use of foreign diplomatic missions.

4. Plan for the Promotion of International Exchange

The third pillar is “Plan for the Promotion of International Exchange.” Youth exchanges and sports exchanges serve as an opportunity to visit Japan’s regions and share their appeal.

After the disaster, the “KIZUNA (Bond) Project” was established with youth from the Asian and Oceanian and North American regions in which bonds were deepened between over 10,000 young people. Currently, the “KAKEHASHI (Bridge) Project”, youth exchange project with North America, is being implemented in continuation of the same spirit. In January of this year university students from the United States visited Miyagi Prefecture and participated in academic exchanges at Tohoku University, homestays, and other activities.

Youth from Japan also visit the United States as part of the “KAKEHASHI Project.” In March of this year 213 students from 12 universities, including Tohoku University, visited the United States and participated in an exchange with local university students and other activities.

Additionally, with an eye towards the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, international cooperation and exchanges are also being implemented through sports. Last year, in connection with these efforts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited the handicapped swimming team of Vietnam to Miyagi Prefecture and held a swim training camp. We will continue to steadfastly promote initiatives of this manner.

In regards to disaster management, the “Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction” was held in Sendai City in March 2015. We will continue to support attracting international conferences to Japan’s regions.

Furthermore, with regards to sister city exchanges, Sendai City has established sister city relationship with seven municipalities including Changchun in China and Gwangju in the Republic of Korea, and the Ministry wishes to continue supporting these efforts.

5. “Diplomatic Action Plan” Summary

The key players are local governments and local individuals living in the region in delivering the attractiveness of various regions in Japan to the world. As part of the “Diplomatic Action Plan” presented today, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will leverage its wide array of diplomatic tools to the maximum extent possible in order to support the initiatives of the people in Japan’s regions. We kindly ask for your understanding of the initiatives of the Ministry and would appreciate any input you can provide.

6. Japanese Diplomacy

This year Japan served as the host country for the G7 Summit after an 8-year gap, and in May, President Obama of the United States visited Hiroshima. Furthermore, Japan serves as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and works responsibly to address international issues such as the North Korean matters. The

attention now is on the policies that will be undertaken by President-elect Trump after he assumes office in January next year. While I will avoid making practical statements based on conjecture, Japan, and the United States have established a relationship over 71 years based on the shared values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. We would like to discuss policies based on that relationship.

On November 17th, Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, held a meeting with President-elect Trump of the United States, the first among world leaders. I believe this meeting served as the first major step in the establishment of a robust relationship of trust going forward.

In December President Putin of Russia will visit Japan. Regarding its relationship with Russia, Japan continues to be in an irregular situation even 71 years after the end of the Second World War, with no peace treaty established with Russia. Concluding a peace treaty remains one of the greatest issues left to Japan after the end of the war. We sincerely hope to advance that cause as part of President Putin's visit in December.

Additionally, we truly wish to realize a Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit during this year. While there are difficult issues among our three nations, the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit held last year was the first in 3 and a half years, and this year Japan will serve as the host nation of the summit. Together Japan, China and the Republic of Korea hold massive economic power approaching one-quarter of the global GDP. Stability in the relationship between Japan, China and the Republic of Korea will contribute to prosperity in the region and through the entire international society. From that perspective as well, we wish to hold the summit within this year.

While a variety of issues exist in Japan's diplomacy, we wish to continue our diplomatic efforts while gaining understanding and vital support from our valued citizens. As Foreign Minister of Japan, I wish to offer my sincere entreaty on that point and thus conclude my keynote address.