

Fukushima as a pioneering place for new energy society

Speech by Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono

on the occasion of the Workshop on the role of regions in the global energy transition

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for attending this workshop today. On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you for joining this event. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the IRENA secretariat and everyone who worked hard to make this event possible.

The global energy landscape is currently undergoing a cataclysmic change. At the same time, as the Paris Agreement entered into force, taking measures against climate change is becoming more and more important. Against this backdrop, thinking about the future of energy is an issue of extreme importance for Japan and for the whole world. In today's workshop, by introducing "The Fukushima Plan for a New Energy Society", Japan intends to present a path towards a new energy society from Fukushima to the world.

(The Great East Japan Earthquake and the suffering of Fukushima)

On March 11th, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake struck Japan. It was a Friday afternoon, nearing the cherry blossom season, when a massive earthquake of magnitude 9.0 suddenly rocked a wide area of eastern Japan, followed by a tsunami reaching up to 40 meters high. Nearly 20,000 people lost their lives due to this once-in-hundreds-years disaster and more than 2,500 people are still missing.

The Great East Japan Earthquake also inflicted a serious accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. Residents around the nuclear power plant were ordered to evacuate their homes. The lives of many people in Fukushima were devastated and they fell into a difficult situation.

(Progress of Reconstruction and Remaining Issues)

Six years and ten months have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake that brought about such serious damage. The Japanese government has taken concrete steps forward, placing the acceleration of reconstruction efforts as one of the top priorities of the Administration. In this regard, let me take this opportunity to reiterate our profound

gratitude and appreciation for the warm support and encouragement we received from the international community during this difficult time.

Reconstruction is progressing steadily. The restoration of infrastructure in schools, hospitals, and roads in the afflicted areas has almost been completed. The radiation dose in Fukushima has steadily declined as a result of decontamination efforts, and evacuation orders have been lifted in most areas.

On the other hand, challenges still remain in proceeding further with reconstruction. One of the challenges is false rumours, prejudices and discriminations that are not based on scientific evidence. Fukushima is a land blessed with rich nature, and is known for premium agricultural products such as rice and peaches. After the nuclear accident, however, it was very sad to see that concerns about radioactive substances discouraged consumers from buying Fukushima agricultural products both in and out of Japan.

Needless to say, the level of Japan's food safety inspection is one of the highest in the world based on scientific evidence. Only products that pass a stringent inspection are distributed to the market, and the number of rejected food items, if any, is decreasing year by year. International organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have assessed that such Japanese food safety management and monitoring systems have been appropriate.

Japan believes that it is extremely important to actively publicize these facts so that the international community can get a better understanding of the situation. In actively doing so, the recent good news is that the EU has lifted rice produced in Fukushima Prefecture from the categorised items subject to regulation.

(The new energy future and the "The Fukushima Plan for a New Energy Society")

In order to further advance reconstruction and chart a bright future with hope, I consider it important to share information with the world not only about the current situation in Fukushima but also the vision Fukushima is pursuing. One of the major visionary concepts is the theme of this workshop, "The Fukushima Plan for a New Energy Society." Launched by Prime Minister Abe five years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, this is an initiative that the Japanese government as a whole is actively promoting.

From Fukushima to the rest of the world, Japan intends to provide an idea to realize a new

energy society by taking various approaches in an accelerated way.

Publicity activities are enhanced to provide a better understanding of the various ongoing projects under “The Fukushima Plan for a New Energy Society”. For example, we have been organizing a series of study tours to Fukushima for the diplomatic corps in Tokyo. The first tour was conducted in August 2016 and participants were guided to AIST/Fukushima Renewable Energy Institute, a unique research institution specializing in renewable energy in Japan. During this tour, participants were introduced to cutting-edge technologies including the development of solar cell materials with the world's top level conversion efficiency, controlling technology to optimally integrate solar/wind power with electricity storage that is indispensable for Smart Communities, and a demonstration apparatus to assess capabilities of organic elements in transferring hydrogen. The feedback we received was overwhelmingly favourable.

I believe that today’s workshop is an excellent opportunity to introduce “The Fukushima Plan for a New Energy Society” to distinguished experts from all over the world with deep knowledge and expertise in new energy and renewables. It is my sincere hope that fruitful exchange of views will deepen your understanding of this vision. Let me also mention that you may enjoy the exhibition of Japanese companies participating in “the Fukushima Plan for a New Energy Society” and displays of Fukushima reconstruction at the Japan pavilion. It would be our pleasure to welcome you to introduce some examples of Japan’s advanced technology and the state of the reconstruction of Fukushima.

The Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games will be convened in 2020. Our aim is to utilise the hydrogen produced in Fukushima on that occasion. In Tokyo, hydrogen-powered fuel cell buses have already started commercial operation. I would encourage you to come to Tokyo and experience the public transportation fuelled by hydrogen. Let me also recommend you to visit Fukushima and other areas in the north-eastern part of Japan to enjoy rich food and culture. Our hospitality is guaranteed.

(Conclusion)

It is my firm belief that turning Fukushima into a pioneering place to chart a future for new energy will bring more success in Fukushima’s reconstruction and it will also lead the world into a bright energy future. Let me conclude my speech by wishing this workshop to be an important step forward in such a direction

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