

CHAPTER 4

Japanese Diplomacy Open to the Public

1. Strengthening of the Diplomatic Implementation Structure and Japanese Citizens Playing Active Roles

To ensure its national interests and appropriately address various challenges facing the international community, Japan needs to reinforce its diplomatic implementation structure which enables it to make the best of its limited human and material resources. To that end, it is important to fully cooperate with various diplomatic players working actively in the international community and promote flexible and well-coordinated “all-Japan” diplomatic efforts.

One effective step toward these goals is to strengthen partnerships with NGOs, whose importance as actors in international cooperation is growing in the face of rising public interest in

international cooperation. Japanese NGOs conduct support activities carefully attuned to local residents’ needs primarily in Asia, as well as in such other regions of the world as Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. Also, based on their in-depth knowledge about the situations of residents in developing countries, these NGOs’ are engaged in a broad range of activities, building networks and making policy recommendations in such specific fields as human rights, education, health care, and the environment. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs values all these roles of NGOs and regards NGOs as important partners.



Providing informal education for working children in a city (Nepal, photo: SHAPLA NEER=Citizens' Committee in Japan for Oversea Support)

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) and Senior Volunteers (SVs) are also important players in international cooperation, working toward the resolution of problems that developing countries face by striving together with local people. These volunteers' activities are visible representation of Japan's ODA in developing countries and are widely appreciated around the world, playing significant



Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) of nursing course giving guidance to nursing students in a hospital (Bolivia, photo: Japan International Cooperation Agency)

roles in promoting economic and social development of those countries, and fostering mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and developing countries. The volunteers who have returned home are expected to contribute their knowledge and experience to Japanese society as well.



Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) of vocational training course teaching how to repair a vehicle to youths such as street children (Philippines, photo: Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA))

2. Assisting Japanese Citizens and Companies Overseas

Today, with approximately 1.11 million Japanese nationals living abroad and the number of Japanese citizens traveling overseas exceeding 15.9 million annually, Japanese people are playing active roles in a variety of fields and regions of the international community. These trends in turn have increased chances for Japanese nationals to encounter various risks and dangers overseas. Understanding that it is an important mission of the government to effectively protect the lives and properties of Japanese nationals, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides assistance and carries out measures to ensure that Japanese nationals can live and/or travel in foreign countries with a sense of security.

The Ministry analyzes and provides various information concerning terrorism and kidnappings, incidents and accidents, infectious diseases hitting ever wider areas including the H1N1 and H5N1 influenza, natural disasters, and more. By doing so, the Ministry raises risk management awareness among Japanese nationals and encourages each of them to take safety measures at his or her own initiative. Meanwhile, the Ministry continues to

strengthen and develop relevant assistance systems and infrastructures in order to provide effective assistance if any Japanese national gets involved in any risks or dangers. Moreover, in addition to issuing passports and certificates, holding overseas elections and providing other fundamental administrative services, the Ministry supports the basics of the daily lives of Japanese citizens residing overseas by assisting Japanese schools and supplementary schools and by providing medical and healthcare-related information.

The Ministry also recognizes the importance of Japanese immigrants and their descendants who have long contributed to political and economic development of their countries of residence and helped strengthen bilateral ties as "bridges" between Japan and those countries. Understanding that their presence is an important asset in Japanese diplomacy, the Ministry continues to support Japanese immigrants and their descendants and maintains cooperation with them in many aspects.

In recent years of increasing globalization, it is extremely important for Japanese companies and

individuals to be more competitive and proactive in overseas markets in carrying out their economic activities. It is one of the major tasks of the Ministry to provide support to Japanese companies so that they can actively operate overseas. Specifically, the Ministry broadly listens to Japanese businesses' views concerning issues facing them and responds to inquires and requests from them. The Ministry also holds dialogues and discussions with various countries on regulatory reforms and improvement of business environment improvement, and requests those countries/regions to make concrete improvements.

Moreover, with the aim of improving the

investment environment and reducing financial burdens for Japanese companies and citizens extending their operations overseas, the Ministry establishes legal and institutional infrastructures by concluding tax treaties, investment agreements and social security agreements, and pursues more effective use and implementation of EPAs.

Furthermore, as Japan is committed to become an "intellectual property-based nation", the Ministry endeavors to enhance the protection of the intellectual property rights of Japanese companies by, for example, working on foreign governments in bilateral and multilateral consultations.

3. Providing Information to the Public and the Internationalization of Japanese Society and Local Regions

In implementing foreign policies, it is essential to gain understanding and support from the public. To do this, it is important to give timely and lucid explanations about such subjects as the specific contents of foreign policies and the roles of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To that end, the Ministry strives to communicate accurate information through various media, including newspapers, TV, and the Internet.

In addition to daily press conferences held by the Foreign Minister, Vice Foreign Minister, Press

Secretary and others, statements by the Foreign Minister and Press Secretary as well as press releases are made available to the public. Since September 29th, press conferences given by the Foreign Minister and other high ranking officials have become open to all media types including the Internet media and freelance journalists. In addition to these means of information transmission, the Ministry's three political-level appointees led by the Foreign Minister appear on TV and in other media as much as possible to communicate Japan's foreign



Minister for Foreign Affairs Okada addressing a inaugural press conference (September 17, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo)

policies directly to the public.

The Ministry also provides and enhances information in an accurate, speedy and lucid way through its website (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/>). In 2009, the Ministry set up its own channel on the video sharing website YouTube. Through these steps, the Ministry tries to provide information in ways that the public can easily recognize. The Ministry also exerts efforts to transmit information overseas by providing information in English on its website and in other local languages on the websites of Japanese diplomatic missions in the countries where those languages are spoken.

Another step that the Ministry is taking is “public relations based on dialogue with the people.” Specifically, the Ministry holds the Foreign Minister’s lectures designed to explain to the public its policies and other topics in an easy-to-understand way, with the aid of visual images, sign language interpreters, etc. The Ministry also pays attention to take sufficient time for Q&A sessions following the lectures. Efforts to familiarize the public with the Ministry’s activities in face-to-face settings include lectures at universities and high schools and outreach lectures concerning ODA given by the Ministry’s officials. The Ministry is also working to improve two-way communication with the public by gathering comments and opinions through its website and by conducting questionnaire surveys.

To fulfill its accountability to the public, the Ministry discloses relevant information while paying close consideration to its trust-based relationships with other countries. In addition to pre-war diplomatic records, post-war diplomatic documents more than 30 years old are disclosed in series at the Diplomatic Record Office.

Local governments and communities play substantial roles in building sound international relations in a wide range of areas. In recent years, local governments, organizations and citizens are actively engaged in diverse activities that earn high recognition in the international community. In view of promoting international mutual understanding, building trust-based relationships and strengthening the power of the Japan brand, local governments and communities are acting as enormously important diplomatic players.

Based on this understanding, the Ministry regards

local governments and communities as major partners in promoting diplomacy and aims to work with them to direct all-Japan efforts toward enhancing the country’s comprehensive diplomatic capacity. To achieve these goals, the Ministry implements various cooperative measures with local governments and other concerned parties, placing particular emphasis on 1) strengthening information sharing and communication, 2) working with local governments and communities to promote major diplomatic policies, and 3) extending cooperation toward international measures taken by local communities. Through these steps, the Ministry hopes to help revitalize local regions and solve problems facing local governments and communities.

Measures to better handle the increase of foreign nationals entering Japan and/or residing in Japan are also important. In 2008, the number of foreigners entering Japan reached approximately 9.15 million, twice as many as in 1998 (approx. 4.56 million). The number of foreigners staying in Japan for a long period of time (registered foreigners) rose sharply to approximately 2.21 million by the end of 2008, some 1.5 times as many as in 1998 (approx. 1.51 million).

In principle, foreign nationals entering the territory of Japan are required to possess appropriate visas to confirm their eligibility to enter the country. The Ministry however, has agreed to exempt visas for those who wish to enter Japan on business or pleasure with no probable harm in entering and also expedite the visa application process given that the increasing number of foreign nationals entering Japan. Meanwhile, the Ministry is conducting stringent screening when illegal employment and human rights violations involving foreign nationals are suspected. In light of a visas for economically stable Chinese individuals since July 2009.

Due to the increasing number of long-stay foreign nationals in Japan, various challenges emerge such as education, employment and housing. The Ministry co-hosted the International Symposium with Aichi Prefectural Government and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in February with the aim of raising awareness of these issues mentioned above regarding foreign residents in Japan.