Message from the Minister for Foreign Affairs

The Great East Japan Earthquake, that struck on March 11, 2011, not just caused immeasurable pain to the disaster victims, but also left huge scars to the whole of Japan. However, people’s behavior amid the disaster and the assistance extended from all over the world demonstrated anew the strength of Japan and the bonds it has built up with the world. Having confidence in itself, Japan needs to work even harder together with the international community toward resolution of the various issues faced in the international community.

Since assuming the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs in September of last year, I have done my utmost to advance a result-oriented “substantial diplomacy” aimed at achieving steady progress toward the goal of maximizing Japan’s national interest. In order for Japan to maximize its national interests, it will be important to minimize risks and maximize opportunities for growth within the Asia-Pacific region in which we are located. In addition to our own efforts on security, this calls for a prosperous and stable regional order based on democratic values, to push ahead within Japan’s reconstruction through coexistence with other countries. Furthermore, a number of new developments have arisen within the international community such as growing prominence of emerging countries, ground breaking developments in information and communication technologies, and the economic crisis in Europe. Today, amid such changes in the international community, it is essential for the purposes of both realizing the global stability necessary to Japan’s prosperity and answering the solidarity and expectations demonstrated by the world, that Japan overcomes its inward-looking tendency and pursues proactive diplomacy as vision of “turn the tables”, to transform challenges into opportunities.

Based on such points of view, I have strived to strengthen our cooperative relationships with other countries, including deepening and further advancing Japan-US Alliance through exchange of opinions among key players from each country in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, to address various issues faced by the world, as well as creating a momentum toward reversing the decline in the budget for Official Development Assistance (ODA) which had dropped by half over the past 14 years, we have dispatched Self-Defense Forces (SDF) unit to make personnel contributions in South Sudan, formulated Guidelines for Overseas Transfer of Defense Equipment etc., and entered into consultations toward participating in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations with the countries concerned.

Diplomacy depends on the combined strength of the entire nation. Japan’s strengths will enable to function most effectively when it promotes “Full Cast Diplomacy”, which its national government, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), small and medium-sized companies, and individuals etc., cooperate and work together to generate synergy effects. For this purpose, it is extremely important to earn the understanding of the government’s efforts by the Japanese people. Thus, it will be possible for Japan to use its distinctive conceptual power by promoting the involvement of all parties concerned.

This Diplomatic Bluebook 2012 is intended to explain the international situation in 2011 and what it means, including Japanese diplomatic efforts, to the Japanese people in a comprehensive manner. I hope that it will lead to a strong Japanese diplomacy based on the broad-ranging support of the Japanese people, by serving not only as a record of past events but also as a foothold for thinking about the path Japan should take in the future.

April 2012

Koichiro Gemba
Minister for Foreign Affairs