

Netherlands queen's day

Crisis brings home importance of ties

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AMBASSADOR OF THE NETHERLANDS

Firstly, I should like to thank The Japan Times for this opportunity to address its readers on the occasion of Queen's Day, our National Day.



This enables me to extend to the people and the government of Japan my deepest sympathy with the loss of lives and the indescribable damage to many communities in the north and northeast as a result of the March 11 earthquake and the tsunami. The Japanese people have lived with natural disasters throughout history, but never on this scale. Undoubtedly, they will recover and the economy will bounce back — but at the moment the need for relief and supplies, including food, water, shelter and electricity, is very grave. The task of reconstruction is daunting in these areas, where whole communities, including the local authorities and their administrations, have been swept away.

Add to this the problems created by the damage to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power

plant — the radiation danger for the staff at the plant and the population living nearby, and the threat of contamination of air, water, soil and crops — and it is evident that Japan faces a major and unprecedented challenge.

In the past weeks it has become clear that Japan does not stand alone in facing this challenge. Many countries have joined in assisting on many fronts, not only by donating money, but also by sending emergency supplies, expert help and manpower. In my country, the Netherlands, many commemorative and fundraising events have been and are still being organized as so many gestures of solidarity with Japan. On April 13, the Dutch Red Cross and the soccer club Ajax together organized a charity event, including a friendly match between Ajax and Japanese club Shimizu S-Pulse in Amsterdam. The match was preceded by a concert of famous Dutch musicians. Many people attended this event and as a result as much as €6 million was raised.

Japan and the Netherlands share a rich history of over 400 years, which constitutes the backbone of our relationship. The present crisis has brought



Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands

home to us just how important this relationship is for us, and how proud we are of this privileged connection. The attitude of the people in the stricken areas and their spirit of resilience and determination have been and still are a true source of inspiration. Their example helped us through the difficult weeks following March 11, when the embassy in Tokyo worked round-the-clock to contact its citizens and liaise with the Japanese authorities whenever necessary.

Japan is important to the Netherlands: It is the second biggest non-European investor in the Netherlands and 400 Japanese companies, including around 80 European headquarters, provide employment to many tens of thousands of

Dutch citizens. The Netherlands offers an attractive corporate tax rate for Japanese corporations and furthermore a favorable tax climate; a well-trained and multilingual workforce; a high standard of living; an excellent infrastructure, not only for logistics (Rotterdam Port, Schiphol Airport) but also for data-exchange. Japanese companies have been welcomed by my country from an early date and constitute one of the largest and most important groups of investors in the Netherlands. The thriving Japanese community of 6,000 Japanese residents, sometimes jokingly referred to as "little Tokyo," contribute not only economically but also culturally to their local communities.

We hope to contribute to the rebuilding of the Tohoku area by making available our knowledge and expertise, especially in the fields of water engineering, water management as well as agriculture. Dutch engineers already worked in this field in Japan in the Meiji Era and water still is an important element in our joint activities — strengthened by the good contact between Their Highnesses the Crown Princes of our countries, who are both active in international water affairs. Japan and

the Netherlands regularly exchange knowhow on state-of-the-art technologies in this field, especially with regard to the rise of the sea level and water security. The Netherlands has a long-standing history of farming on relatively small-scale areas under the latently present threat of floods, rising sea levels and subsequent salination of agricultural soil. Based on these experiences, the Netherlands have

developed a profound knowledge and knowhow of sustainable, innovative and as yet profitable approaches to agricultural production like the concept of agro-parks — the spatial clustering of agricultural activities (production) with other activities like processing, trade, supply, logistics, service and knowledge — or brackish agriculture, growing salt-tolerant crops. Also in this field I am looking forward to cooperating with the farming community of Japan to restructure the agricultural sector in the stricken areas.

But for the time being, dona-

tions from the Netherlands toward the rescue effort will be channeled through the Japanese Red Cross Society. This includes the donation that will be made by the embassy in Tokyo of the

money saved by canceling our Queen's Day Reception this year, as well as the donation of €1 million by the Netherlands government, which was made the day after the disaster took place.

Sincere Greetings to Her Majesty Queen Beatrix On the Occasion of Her Birthday



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