

Philippine independence day

Building stronger bonds with Japan

Manuel M. Lopez
AMBASSADOR OF THE PHILIPPINES

On the occasion of the 113th anniversary of the declaration of Philippine Independence, it is my deep honor to convey my sincerest felicitations to Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor Akihito and the Empress Michiko, the government and people of Japan, and the Filipino community in Japan.



Relief and assistance

I wish to reiterate the profound condolences and the solidarity of the government and people of the Republic of the Philippines over the enormous loss of life and damage to property caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 11. The Philippines recognizes Japan's unrelenting efforts to bring the situation at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant under control, in coordination with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and other international partners. We greatly appreciate Ja-

pan's pledge of continued maximum transparency on developments relating to the power plant.

Having contended with natural calamities in the past, Filipinos understand the grief and sorrow such calamities bring. Shortly after the March 11 tragedy, the Philippines sent more than 10 tons of relief goods and supplies and offered humanitarian aid to the affected areas in the Tohoku region. Philippine Embassy officials and volunteers from the Filipino community undertook a number of relief missions to affected areas in Fukushima, Miyagi, and Iwate prefectures. In the Philippines and in Japan, concerned Filipino individuals and groups organized solidarity concerts and fundraising events, resulting in further donations that were coursed through the Philippine Embassy and other international relief organizations such as the Red Cross.

The Philippines actively participated in the Special Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-Japan Ministerial Meeting on April 9 in Jakarta to express ASEAN's solidarity with Japan after the Great East Japan Earthquake



Strength in numbers: Philippine Embassy officials and Filipino community volunteers come together during a relief mission to Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, on May 21. PHILIPPINE EMBASSY

and reaffirm the importance of cooperation in disaster relief and management. In the meeting, the Philippines offered Japanese affected by the disaster a haven for rest, refuge, and medical treatment.

Filipino students and performers also joined the ASEAN Youth Caravan of Goodwill, which conducted volunteer activities in Miyagi Prefecture from June 3 to 5. During the caravan, the Filipino participants joined youths from other ASEAN member states in visiting disaster-affected sites, helping clear out debris, giving cul-

tural performances, and providing encouragement to further strengthen the human bonds of good will that have long existed between ASEAN and Japanese peoples.

It is not a surprise that there has been a massive display of support for Japan from the international community after March 11. Many countries appreciate Japan's positive contributions in the United Nations and various multilateral and regional forums. Japan has also been generous in providing development assistance and disaster relief to many countries.

Strategic relations

Japan is a strategic and valued partner of the Philippines, with the two countries having significant economic, political-security, and social-cultural relations.

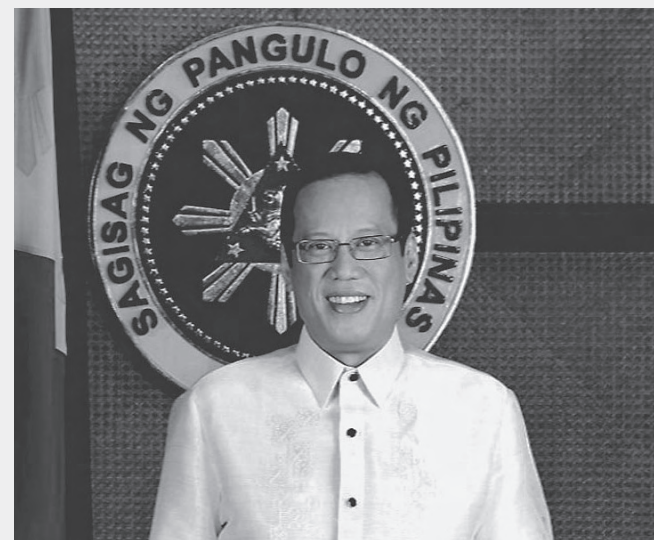
Japan continues to be the largest provider of official development assistance, and is currently the largest trading partner and one of the largest sources of direct investment to the Philippines. In fact, Japan is the first and only country so far that the Philippines has concluded a bilateral free trade agreement with. This is the Philippines-Ja-

pan Economic Partnership Agreement, which entered into force in December 2008. The Philippines maintains a deep interest in the smooth implementation and realization of the benefits of this economic partnership agreement, which is a key pillar of the Philippines-Japan partnership.

The visit of President Benigno S. Aquino III to Japan for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting held in Yokohama in November 2010 highlighted the importance of the Philippines' economic relations with Japan and the Asia-Pacific region. At the APEC meeting, President Aquino called for more and open trade and investment and the speeding up of the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTA-AP) with existing bilateral and regional free trade agreements as building blocks.

As part of the call for greater and more open trade and investment, Japan was the first country that a team of Philippine economic ministers visited in early February 2011 to promote the idea of public-private partnership (PPP), one of President Aquino's centerpiece economic programs. The economic ministers explained that the Philippines is encouraging infrastructure development through PPPs. There is also a wealth of trade and investment opportunities in the country, especially in the areas of business and knowledge process outsourcing, sustainable mining, renewable energy and tourism. The PPP roadshow was met with much interest by Japanese businessmen and investors.

In the area of tourism, there has been a steady growth in tourism arrivals from Japan to the Philippines in the past few years. In 2010, Japan ranked third in the Philippines' list of visitor arrivals, with more than 358,000 Japanese nationals arriving in the country. This figure represents a 10.39 percent increase from the number of visitor arrivals from Japan in 2009. On the other hand, the



President of the Philippines Benigno S. Aquino III

Amid adversity, Japanese inspire

Benigno S. Aquino III
PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES

As we Filipinos celebrate the 113th anniversary of our country's independence, I take this occasion to convey my warmest greetings to the people of Japan and the readers of The Japan Times for sharing the spirit of this historic event with us, and for counting as among our committed allies in fostering harmony and cooperation in our region.

Our two nations enjoy a deep and dynamic relationship, sustained by our vibrant cultural exchanges, our economic partnerships, and our shared desire for peace and stability. Now that the Philippines has taken significant steps in establishing a responsive, honest and transparent government, I am confident that we can further strengthen our solidarity. Also worth commending, indeed, are the resilience, unity and fortitude that the people of Japan have shown in times of crisis. As my country confronts the challenges of national transformation, we Filipinos take great inspiration from Japan's capacity to rebuild itself amid adversity.

We welcome you to witness a better, revitalized Philippines that thrives under the daylight of hope and change. Let us continue to work together as we address today's global issues for our mutual benefit and that of the international community.

Philippine Embassy is actively engaged in encouraging more Filipino tourists to visit Japan.

Strengthening bonds

In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Philippines believes that Japan "remains open for business." The Philippines reiterates its commitment to participate in the recovery of Japan by intensifying and deepening mutual trade, investment, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. The Philippines likewise remains ready to assist and cooperate with Japan in

the important task of reconstruction.

Japan is home to at least 228,000 Filipinos and there is a growing number of Japanese families in the Philippines. I am sure that the steady exchanges of professionals, skilled workers, students and tourists can only deepen understanding and cultural appreciation between our two peoples.

As close friends and neighbors, I am confident that the Philippines and Japan will continue to strengthen and deepen their strategic ties in the coming years.

Filipino workers provide help to the people of East Japan

Caregivers in Fukushima

"Wala naman po kaming nagawang kabayanihan (We did not do anything heroic)," said four Filipino caregivers who refused to leave their patients at the Komine-en home for the elderly in Shirakawa, Fukushima Prefecture.

Shirakawa is located less than 100 km from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The four caregivers — Gemma Juanay, Juliet Tobay, Sandra Otacan and Mercedes Aquino — said that despite the pleas of their families for them to go back to the Philippines after the nuclear accident at the power plant, they felt that they should remain in their jobs to

continue to provide care and companionship to their elderly patients.

"Naawa lang po kami sa mga matatanda na inaalanagan namin sa Komine-en (We really felt concern for the elderly people we are taking care of in Komine-en)," the four caregivers said.

Officials at the Komine-en elderly home said they were grateful to the Filipino caregivers for staying on, while their patients expressed appreciation for their dedication and kindness.

In recognition of their efforts, Juanay, Tobay, Otacan and Aquino were invited by the Foreign Ministry of Japan to a reception on May 11, 2011, held in appreciation for the solidarity

and support shown by the international community to Japan. They are also being considered for nomination to the Philippines' Bagong Bayani Awards 2011 (New Heroes Awards 2011).

Welders build houses

Eleven Filipino welders from the disaster-stricken area of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, have secured new training contracts in two companies located in Sakaide, Kagawa Prefecture, following their displacement after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Julieto Canoy, Raffy Ibabo, Malvin Nengasca, Malvin Brutas, Manuel Gonzaga, Jr., Carlo

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Relief efforts: Ambassador Manuel M. Lopez (right) speaks with State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Yutaka Banno on March 25 regarding the Philippines' donation of relief goods for the Tohoku region. MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF JAPAN



At the scene: Ambassador Manuel M. Lopez meets Filipino nationals in Sendai on March 20 to discuss their situation after the Great East Japan Earthquake. PHILIPPINE EMBASSY

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Mabuhay!

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Staying put: Female Filipino caregivers in Fukushima meet with Philippine and Japanese officials. PHILIPPINE EMBASSY

Filipino workers help

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Quinones, Joser Pasinag, Manuel Hugo Jr., Jacob Jaucian, Rodney Famorcan and Lito Bela were previously employed by Yamanishi Corp., a ship-building company based in Ishinomaki.

Through the intercession of the Philippine Labor Office in Tokyo, eight of them have now been hired by Tokai House Co. while the other three have been hired by Minotsu Ironworks Co.

The workers hired by Tokai

House are now engaged in making components for prefabricated houses for earthquake and tsunami survivors.

They expressed a sense of fulfillment because they started off as victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster but are now doing work that helps other victims.

The Filipino workers are hoping to finish their three-year training programs in Japan and eventually earn Japanese skills certifications.



Still on the job: Clifford Paragua (right), labor attache of the Philippine Embassy, speaks to Filipino welders displaced by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. PHILIPPINE EMBASSY

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