

Message from Mr. Takumi Nemoto, Minister for Reconstruction

It is now two years since the Great East Japan Earthquake struck on 11 March 2011, and as such is an appropriate time to reflect on the progress made to date and remind ourselves of the work that remains to be done. As we are all vividly aware, the March 2011 disaster caused unprecedented damage in the Tohoku region and resulted in a period of crisis that impacted the entire nation. Reconstruction and revitalization of the economies, communities and livelihoods impacted by this disaster remains a national priority.

After two years of steady progress, the government of Japan is firmly committed to further accelerating its reconstruction efforts. Priority issues including rebuilding living environments that are resilient and able to withstand future natural disasters, the restoration of livelihoods in disaster areas, supporting those affected by the nuclear accident, and regional economic revitalization will be significantly expedited. Reflecting this commitment, the government has pledged to secure the financial resources necessary to expand the budgetary framework for the reconstruction of disaster areas by 6 trillion yen to 25 trillion yen over the five years starting the fiscal year 2011.

We are proud of the progress made thus far and are grateful for the strong support we continue to receive from our international partners. Essential public services, utilities and infrastructure were quickly restored, and businesses that were damaged are back on their feet. Stringent food safety standards have restored public confidence in Japanese produce, while the number of foreign visitors to Japan has returned to pre-earthquake levels.

Looking forward, we will take a hands-on approach to reconstruction, improving on the “vertically-segmented” administrative structure. This means concrete measures to strengthen processes and understanding at the ground level, with oversight unified within the Reconstruction Agency to allow for more efficient decision-making and implementation. The Agency will continue in its role as the ‘Control Tower’ for all reconstruction efforts, including working to ensure that relevant ministries take the necessary action.

Among other initiatives aimed at stepping-up progress, the government is establishing a ‘tandem headquarters’ (Tokyo and Fukushima) mechanism for the reconstruction and revitalization of Fukushima, to coordinate and accelerate efforts. The Reconstruction Agency will increase its headcount from approximately 120 to 160 employees, and a full-time Secretary-General has been appointed responsible for supervising all efforts to revitalize the Fukushima area. These

developments are a demonstration of the government's commitment to tackling the challenges faced in Fukushima and affected areas, and meeting the needs of the people.

There is still much to be done. As we look to accelerate the pace of progress, cooperation with international partners is especially important for economic revitalization, and foreign direct investment and cutting-edge technologies have hugely important roles to play. For the government's part, we must work to ensure the right conditions are in place to attract this kind of input, both in terms of infrastructure and public facilities, taking into consideration factors such as tax incentives and ease of doing business. The government's aim is to restore Tohoku's position as a place for innovation, and for reconstruction of the affected areas to spur revitalization of the broader Japanese economy.

As we mark two years since the disaster, we would like to once again express our heartfelt gratitude for the continued support and friendship of our international partners. Though we face challenges, Japan will tackle them proactively and with determination. The lessons learned from this crisis and the road to recovery can benefit not only Japan but also the international community.