

**SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR AT THE OPENING CEREMONY FOR ISOBE
COMMUNITY CENTRE, SOMA CITY, FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURE ON
SATURDAY 13 JULY 2013**

Mayor of Soma City Tachiya-san

Residents of Isobe area

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Kon-ni-chi-wa.

1 It is my great pleasure to join you here today for the opening ceremony of the new community centre in Isobe, Soma City.

2 This is my second visit to Soma City. I first visited Soma City in April 2012, one week after I took up post in Japan, to pay my respects to the victims of the March 11th disasters. In fact, Soma City was the first city, outside Tokyo, that I visited in Japan.

3 On 11 March 2011, the world watched in horror as the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami wreaked widespread destruction across northeast Japan. Soma City was one of the worst-affected areas. Lives were lost, and many houses and community facilities suffered significant damage. The Isobe Community Centre, which I had the opportunity to visit last year, was completely destroyed.

4 The people of Japan and of Soma City have however responded to the disasters with unity and fortitude. There are countless stories of Japanese people selflessly helping one another to overcome the numerous challenges they faced. These episodes are an inspiration to people around the world.

5 In Singapore, the government quickly despatched a specialist search and rescue team to assist in the rescue efforts. Soma City was the team's first destination in the Tohoku region. A donation drive launched by the Singapore Red Cross Society raised over S\$35 million (2,100 million yen) for relief and recovery efforts. This sum, though small by Japan's standards, and by the scale of the disaster, is one of the largest sums ever contributed by Singaporeans to disaster relief and rebuilding in a foreign country. The contributions have been channelled into four reconstruction projects in the Tohoku region, including the one being opened today.

6 The Isobe Community Centre is the product of many months of cooperation and consultation between the Singapore government, Soma City and the Singapore Red Cross. The Memorandum of Cooperation for the design and construction of the centre was signed by Mayor Tachiya-san, Singapore Red Cross Chairman Tee Tua Ba and myself, and witnessed by Singapore's Foreign Minister K Shanmugam and his then-counterpart Gemba in June 2012. My Deputy Chief of Mission Mr William Tan attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the community centre in January this year.

7 I would like to offer my congratulations on the completion and opening of the community centre, which is a milestone in the rejuvenation and renewal of Soma City. Although this is only a small contribution from Singapore, I hope that it will help to serve the needs of the people of Soma City, and become an enduring symbol of the *kizuna* between Soma and Singapore.

8 Thank you. *Arigato gozaimashita.*

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