

Consul-General Okada's remarks
at "Kizuna 10: Inochi (Life) – A Decade of Resilience",
the 10th Anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake
on March 11, 2021

Good afternoon, everyone. I am honored to have the opportunity to speak to you at this Kizuna 10 event. Today marks the tenth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. I want to thank the people of Chicago and the Midwest for their extraordinary support and encouragement of the Tohoku region in the days after March 11th, 2011.

First of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Osaka Committee of Chicago Sister Cities International for the tireless effort to coordinate today's event. Our Honorable guests, Governor of Illinois J.B. Pritzker, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Governor of Iwate Prefecture Takuya Tasso kindly sent video messages for us. Governor Pritzker and Mayor Lightfoot also generously joined the Kizuna Executive Committee as the Honorary Co-Chairs. Thank you so much.

We also have many partner organizations supporting this event. I'd like to express my gratitude to Chicago-Osaka Sister Cities, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry of Chicago, the Japan America Society of Chicago, and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) Chicago office.

Today we are commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. I would like to express my condolences to all those who lost family members and relatives in the disaster. My thoughts are also with

all those who still suffer from the profound devastation caused by the Earthquake.

Today's theme is "Inochi- Life." Naturally, it reminds me of the fact that during this pandemic crisis many people around the world have lost their lives. I would also like to offer my most sincere condolences to all of the families and loved ones who lost someone to the virus as well as my heartfelt sympathy to all those who have been affected adversely by the pandemic.

As a proverb says, "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

In the ten years since the Great East Japan Earthquake, our bonds of friendship -or Kizuna- have grown stronger and stronger. When the Earthquake struck 10 years ago, the United States immediately stepped forward in a truly robust manner. Japanese people remember the U.S. Military's "Operation: Tomodachi" that helped provide disaster relief in Tohoku. In the Midwest, many charitable events and activities were held to support those affected by the Earthquake. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the outpouring of support, the kind words, and the offers of assistance that we have received from across the Midwest. Our Japan-U.S. friendship is remarkably strong thanks to these people-to-people exchanges of support and goodwill.

Later this year, Japan will host the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. It will be a symbol of overcoming the pandemic. It will also be the Reconstruction Olympics and Paralympics. Japan will take this opportunity to show our resiliency and the state of reconstruction efforts to the entire world in cooperation with disaster-affected areas. In two weeks, the Olympic

Torch Relay is scheduled to start in Fukushima Prefecture, which is a symbol of recovery and rebuilding in the area. Fukushima Prefecture will also host baseball and softball games, and Miyagi Prefecture will host soccer games. These are great developments there.

In conclusion, I hope that this event will also deepen our awareness of the importance of “Inochi- Life” and “Kizuna- bond.” As is stated in the Joint Message of Prime Minister Suga and President Biden, which was released just several hours ago, in support of those who continue to struggle in the wake of the disaster and to honor who we lost, Japan and the United States will continue to move forward shoulder-to-shoulder as Tomodachi or friend to finish the reconstruction of Tohoku region and to realize a better future for us all.

Therefore, once international travel resumes after the Covid-19 crisis, I would like to encourage all of you to visit the vibrant Tohoku region to enjoy amazing scenery and nature, beautiful castles and old temples, authentic foods and comfortable hot springs. You will meet very gentle people there. People in Tohoku region are regarded as the kindest people. They are famous for being so nice just like you are. So, your visit to Tohoku region will be truly appreciated from the bottom of the hearts of these genuine local people. Just imagine please. Genuine people meet genuine people. How wonderful it will be! And it will also be another cornerstone for our Japan-US friendship.

Thank you.