

# UNDP welcomes Japan's role in spreading disaster prevention

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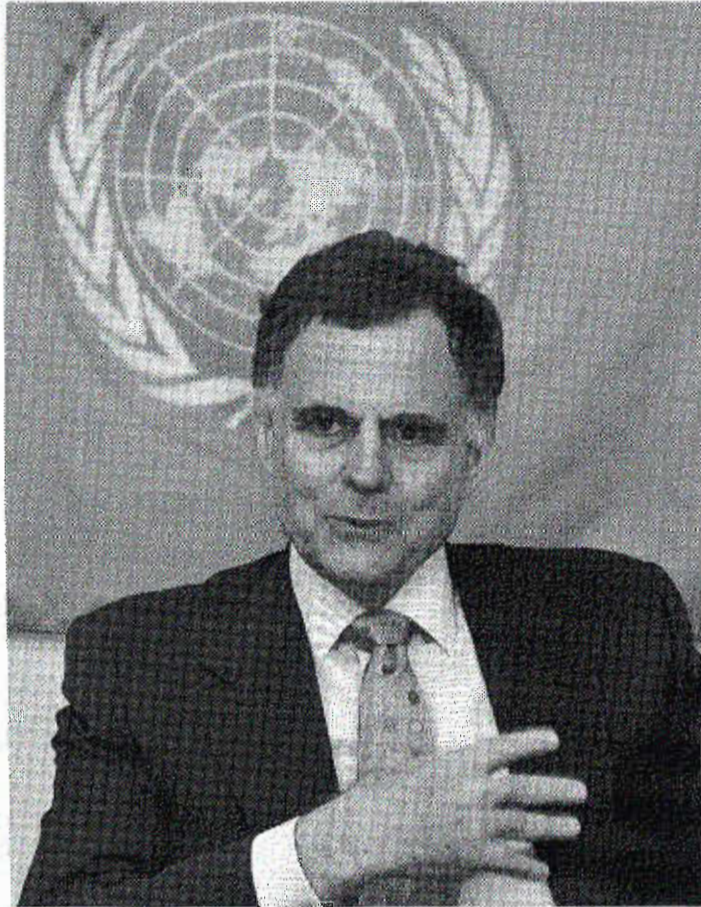
Jordan Ryan, U.N. assistant secretary-general, assistant administrator and director of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), visited Japan earlier this month as part of a delegation holding various strategic dialogues with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The Japan Times took the opportunity to interview Ryan and hear his views as well as UNDP's stance on its collaborative relationship with Japan. Excerpts of the interview follow.

**What were your feelings toward Japan when you heard about the earthquake and tsunami hitting the country on March 11?**

My first reaction was of deep compassion, sorrow and sympathy for the Japanese people. There were so many who lost their lives and families. Despite such conditions, Japan showed its solidarity and its commitment to contribute to the international community.

Both the United Nations and UNDP have a deep sense of gratitude toward Japan and its people's willingness to really help, in spite of all the suffering they have recently undergone. It is easy to say, "We cannot live up to our commitment and we are only going to focus on rebuilding." Instead, Japan is saying, "Yes, it's difficult and we have budget issues, but we do have the knowledge, and we are committed to contributing internationally and remain engaged with the world."

UNDP Administrator Helen Clark heralds such an attitude and stance, and is especially in-



**Dialogue: U.N. Assistant Secretary-General Jordan Ryan speaks to The Japan Times in Tokyo on Oct. 6.** YOSHIAKI MIURA

terested in retaining a long-term relationship with Japan to work together against various disaster risks.

**Do you think the events of March 11 have presented some meaningful learning experiences for the international arena?**

Yes. Japan represents the image of a country that comes together in times of crisis. We know that it has invested in disaster preparedness, probably more so than any other country in the world. It is true that 20,000 lives lost or still missing is a vast number. But if it had not made such

investments, the death toll would have been astronomical.

Japan realized long ago that disaster preparedness pays off and that such preparation does not lie in the hands of a single ministry: It is the responsibility of the government, the society, the companies, everybody in the country.

Also of note is that Japan has been educating its own citizens, especially the young people, on natural disasters. This has been trans-generational. Grandparents knew how terrible the tsunamis were. But such knowledge and experience usually fade over time. We are urged to find ways to retain and pass on the knowledge. I find Japan at the global forefront in conveying such knowledge to younger generations.

In fact, I think Japan is courageously using the tragedy to get more involved with the world. I cannot tell you how touched we are at the U.N. and UNDP with the stance of Japan. The country has translated its determination into action by hosting various seminars and workshops for experts, first for those from Southeast Asia. Japan is inviting people to come and learn about disaster response. UNDP has been asked and we very much look forward to help other earthquake-prone countries to learn from and share experiences with Japan.

Japan is also at the forefront of understanding the concept of resilience, as well as in society preparedness, including education, health and emergency systems. The country has approached us because we have a vast outreach toward many developing countries on the ground. Hence, the UNDP-Japan partnership should also help those up-and-coming countries in tackling various natural disasters.

Furthermore, Japan is keen

in offering help to man-made crises, such as the situation in Afghanistan, or conflict-ridden Somalia.

It also is willing to support the peace-building actions of UNDP that encourage people to have dialogues instead of fights. Concurrently, the UNDP is actively engaged in the activities of TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development), organized by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to promote the true development of African countries.

**Speaking of man-made crises, the nuclear accident at the Fukushima power plant has among its causes a human element, along with the earthquake and tsunami. Doesn't that present a distinctive learning opportunity for mankind?**

Yes, it is for the broader international community. We must seriously look at the locations of the nuclear power plants and so on. In order to take a constructive move forward, we must plan for scenarios that have so far been totally unimaginable or unexpected.

There is an immense opportunity, especially for the developing countries as well as the developed nations that are planning to build or have already built their own nuclear plants close to or on the active earthquake faults. They can draw on the experience of Japan, analyze the conditions carefully and share the findings widely.

In order to minimize the fear of the people about the situation, getting accurate, honest information out as quickly as possible becomes crucial. Information sharing and communication become extremely important from the very beginning. Equally important are the monitoring and the announcement of the radiation levels on a daily basis, just as Japan is doing in its newspapers right now.

Also, in terms of food safety, steps that are taken to clean up the contaminated areas, as well as the accumulation of the knowledge on how to clean the sea and the land, should be shared and disseminated.

UNDP, with the generous support of Japan through the Human Security Fund, had worked in the Chernobyl area doing a lot of knowledge-gathering and research in the past. We have been sharing that information with the Japanese government, the donor of our project. The U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is also very interested in the nuclear issue of Fukushima and is bringing together a group of experts, such as the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and the WHO (World Health Organization), on a bilateral basis.

As a development agency, UNDP really hopes that the lessons learned are shared as much as possible and as quickly as possible with developing countries. Every creative mind should be put together and out-of-the-box thinking should be promoted.

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