

## **“Toward an Intercultural Japan”**

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### **No. 49 –Design of Reconstruction from the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake**

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On April 14<sup>th</sup>, the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake Reconstruction Design Council, established by the Japanese government to draft a “blueprint for reconstruction that is intended to instill residents of the affected area with bright hope and courage for the future, and that can be shared by all citizens and leads to rebirth of a Japan which is rich and vibrant,” convened for its first meeting. The council included representatives from the Tohoku or Northeast Region, including the governors from the three devastated prefectures, and some experts who were members of the council that guided recovery efforts following the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake, as well as one special adviser. A working group comprising nineteen specialists from the economic and financial fields has also been established under the council so that individual issues, such as local regeneration and management of the fisheries industry, are discussed based on specialized expertise. By the end of June, the council’s first proposal will be prepared and a final version will be completed by the year’s end.

The Reconstruction Design Council was formed along the lines of the 1995 Council set up after the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake, but the two disasters are very different due to the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant accident, which continues to pose a serious and ever–changing danger, thereby making reconstruction planning extremely difficult. Although the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) announced a roadmap towards restoration from the accident, in which release of radioactive materials is to be under control within nine months, the international community remains very uneasy, partly because the Japanese government has determined recently that this accident is as serious as the Chernobyl accident in the former USSR, the world’s worst nuclear accident to date, raising it to Level 7 on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale. This is particularly the case after TEPCO’s discharge of low–level radioactive water into the ocean earlier this month, prompting criticism of the way that Japan is handling the crisis.

Already the number of countries imposing restrictions on the importation of Japan’s agricultural and manufactured products is increasing. Not only in eastern Japan but across the country the number of tourists from abroad has dropped dramatically. Immediately after the earthquake, many international students from abroad returned home temporarily and the number of international students is likely to grow stagnant for a while. Attracting highly skilled workers

from abroad may also prove difficult. Due to concerns over electricity shortages, foreign corporations may move their operations to Hong Kong or Singapore. Thus, if the nuclear accident worsens or proves to be protracted, the 'Japan Brand,' which is based on the image of Japan as a prosperous and safe country, will suffer significant damage and its image may be replaced by that of a dangerous and contaminated country.

To wipe away such an image, preventing the nuclear accident from becoming worse and firmly establishing information disclosure are the most basic conditions to be met; and adopting a bold vision for reconstruction and effectively conveying it around the globe are further necessary. This new vision should include viewpoints of disaster prevention, a shift away from nuclear power, energy conservation and decentralization, and should offer a model for the global community of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In order to achieve that, why not incorporate a variety of ideas from around the world and recruit human resources and businesses as well that will contribute to a reconstruction of the Tohoku region as well as Japan in general? And only when the reconstruction process is conveyed to and shared with the international community, will revival of the 'Japan Brand' be realized.

In taking a look at the composition of the Reconstruction Design Council, one will notice that among the sixteen members there is only one woman. Furthermore, most men are in their sixties. Then, although the nineteen members of the working group include more people in their fifties and forties, there are only two women. And among these combined thirty-five members, there is not even one foreign citizen. Can a group of such composition draft a creative vision for the future, which appeals to the people of Japan and the world, including younger generations?