

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

(Remarks of Ambassador Mondale, April 27, 1995)

By encouraging volunteerism through community action, NGOs play a unique and positive role in civic society. I hope that governments will recognize this and encourage the presence of NGOs by creating an environment that allows them to thrive. If we do this, then NGOs will be free to build what I call human bridges, ones that can span continents and bring the people of the world closer together.

Today in Japan there are a number of non-profit organizations serving a variety of social needs. Educational groups, environmental groups, and other international aid organizations come to mind. In fact, there are over 26,000 non-profit organizations registered in Japan.

The desire of the Japanese public to help others in need is impressive. We saw it last year when many young Japanese people volunteered to go to Cambodia to help with that nation's democratic elections. And we saw it following the Great Hanshin earthquake, where the Japanese public showed such exceptional generosity. A recent poll, taken shortly after that earthquake, showed that about 80% of the people surveyed in Japan would have liked to join in rescue and relief efforts if there were a way for them to do so.

At the same time, however, the present support system for non-profit organizations here does not seem to do justice to the tremendous interest of the Japanese public.

It is no secret that the system here to gain the most preferred non-profit status is very difficult, and less than 3 percent of all NGOs here are found to qualify. I am particularly concerned about how difficulties facing NGOs in Japan are affecting educational and cultural exchanges programs.

The role of international NGOs is growing rapidly and we will all benefit to the extent that we work with them and lend them our support.



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