

BUILDING BRIDGES: ENCOURAGING INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE AND VOLUNTEERISM  
(REMARKS OF AMB. MONDALE TO THE ROTARY CLUB OF TOKYO)  
(As Prepared for Delivery, February 22, 1995)

Thank you so much for that kind introduction and let me thank the members of the Rotary Club of Tokyo for inviting me and my colleagues in the Diplomatic Corps to be here with you today.

I want to begin, if I may, by saying a few words about the Kobe earthquake, the worst natural disaster since the great Kanto earthquake of 1923. I recently visited the Kobe area, and I was appalled by the magnitude of the disaster.

There is a lesson here for all of us, for this tragedy reminds us again of how much we gain from working together. President Clinton called me shortly after the earthquake struck, and we immediately conveyed to the Government of Japan our readiness to assist in any way we could. American forces in Japan shipped tens of thousands of blankets and thousands of gallons of water to Kobe and erected tents there. The President sent a team headed by FEMA director Witt to offer our own experience in handling disasters and for us to learn lessons as well.

Our government was not alone in extending such assistance. In fact, over 40 nations, many of them represented here today, within a very short time expressed their desire to offer support and help came in all kinds of ways.

But, government to government support is only half the story. The more remarkable thing is the way in which people pulled together at a non-official level to help each other out, both individually and through non-governmental organizations like this one. I was moved when I heard the story of one of your members, Mr. Daisaburo Nakamoto, of the Rotary Club of Kobe, who, when the earthquake hit, immediately thought of the young American girl in Kobe on a Rotary Scholarship, Miss Sarah Fulham of Hyannis, Mass. Mr. Nakamoto set off to track her down, walking through Kobe for hours, and when he found her, devoted himself to getting her home safely. All of this in the midst of his own personal difficulties following the earthquake.

I know that soon after the earthquake your membership quickly gathered donations and sent them to Kobe. I was also very much impressed with the way in which

you have been coordinating with your sister Club in Washington, D.C. so that they too can contribute to the reconstruction of Kobe.

The importance to governments of NGOs like yours in responding to situations like last month's earthquake cannot be overstated. While there is much that governments can and must do when disaster strikes, there are also many instances in which the role of NGOs is critical.

Following the earthquake, our Embassy and Consulates received hundreds of calls from people across the United States offering money, clothes, food, and their own services. I know that my diplomatic colleagues here today can attest to similar experiences. Thanks to the well-established presence of many NGOs in Japan, like the Rotary Club, like the Red Cross, we were able to refer these individual offers of assistance to the right people, rather than turning them away. You then worked closely with the Government of Japan to bring the needed relief to the citizens of Kobe.

By encouraging volunteerism through community action, NGOs such as yours 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 last month in Kobe, where we were all overwhelmed by the generosity of the Japanese public. In fact, a recent poll, taken shortly after the Kobe earthquake, showed that about 80% of the people surveyed would have liked to join in rescue and relief efforts there 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.

The government of Japan is starting to do more for NGOs here. Prime Minister Murayama has formed a project team to improve the environment for non-profit organizations. We welcome these efforts. 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.

But I am particularly concerned about how these difficulties facing NGOs in Japan are affecting educational and cultural exchanges programs.

Earlier I spoke of the importance of building human bridges to strengthen our relationship with Japan. I can think of no more important way of achieving this than by expanding the number of educational and cultural exchanges between us. If you believe, as I do, that the U.S.-Japan relationship is central to world growth and regional stability, then surely we need to underpin it with the deepening human relationships that flow from educational, cultural, and other experiences that lead to a broader understanding of our two very different cultures. The Rotary Club has been a leader in this field and many young Americans and Japanese owe their first taste of each others culture to your generous scholarship program.

Both of our nations are in full agreement on the importance of exchanges. America's commitment to educational exchanges with Japan dates back 50 years, with the creation of the Fulbright program. Senator Fulbright, who passed away this month, put it so well when he once said that "educational exchange can turn nations into people, contributing as no other form of communication can to the humanizing of international relations."

Former Prime Minister Nakasone also well understood the connection between exchanges and international partnership. Almost a decade ago, Nakasone set a goal of increasing the number of foreign students coming to Japan for study to 100,000 by the

year 2000. Mr. Nakasone also sponsored the adoption of the highly successful JET program which hires thousands of American teachers and others to teach English in Japanese high schools.

More recently, at last month's Summit between President Clinton and Prime Minister Murayama in Washington, the President commented on the need to increase the number of American students coming to Japan. As you know, almost 47,000 Japanese students travel to the U.S. each year, but only 1,700 American students come to Japan annually, and this figure is declining. This should trouble both our nations; certainly, substantially increasing the flow of young Americans to Japan will benefit us all.

There are many reasons for the low number of American students coming to Japan in recent years, including the high yen, the language barrier, and the high cost of living in Japan. But a study commissioned by Prime Minister Hosokawa last year also identified many serious regulatory impediments in Japan to increasing the number of foreign students, scholars and others in Japan -- restrictions that are not found in the U.S.

One of the most serious impediments, according to this report, is the difficult regulatory environment within which NGOs involved in educational and cultural exchanges must operate. These NGOs, even well known ones like the Fulbright Commission, are in the same unsatisfactory position I referred to earlier as affecting almost all other NGOs in Japan.

The Hosokawa report and follow-on studies have uncovered many more regulatory impediments in Japan that limit the number of exchange students who come here from the United States. But I did not come here today to read out a list of complaints. Our colleagues in the Japanese Government are well aware of these barriers to exchanges and I know that they are trying, within the existing regulations, to help out where they can. But the fact is that the restrictive regulations still exist. We hope that the current emphasis on regulatory reform will bring progress in addressing those barriers which make it so difficult for our people to learn about each other.

In closing, let me just say this: One of the great success stories in modern political history is the story of how our two nations, who fought each other in some of the most bitter fighting in world history, now have shaped an enduring alliance. Today,

we are partners in defending the peace and security of the region; we are partners in supporting democracy and respect for human rights around the world; we are partners in stemming the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; we are partners in preserving the global environment; we are partners in improving the health of our citizens; and we are partners in advancing the frontiers of science.

We succeeded in building the cooperative partnership that we have today in great part by tending to the human component of our relationship over the last fifty years.

Today, we are more interdependent than ever. Precisely because of this interdependence, I believe that it is all the more urgent that our governments do what they can to make sure that we understand and respect each other's society and culture.

We can do this by supporting the work of international NGOs like yours and by expanding educational and cultural exchanges between us. By broadening our human ties in this way, I know that we will secure a strong, prosperous U.S.-Japan partnership for decades to come.



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