

## Triologue

### Natural Disasters and International Support

Kenzo Oshima: Former U.N. ambassador and former United Nations Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

Margareta Wahlström: U.N. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

Makoto Iokibe: President of the Hyogo Earthquake Memorial 21st Century Research Institute; Chancellor of the Prefectural University of Kumamoto; Chairman of the Reconstruction Promotion Committee, Reconstruction Agency; and Emeritus professor of Kobe University

#### [Mr. Iokibe]

I would like now to talk about international cooperation and support with Ms. Margareta Wahlström and Mr. Kenzo Oshima. Ms. Margareta Wahlström has become a global symbol of disaster risk reduction activities of the United Nations. Mr. Kenzo Oshima is the former U.N. ambassador and has been involved in support activities for international disasters for a long time. Now he deals with the issues relating to nuclear power stations and peace education in Hiroshima. First of all, I would like ask them how they became involved in the area of disaster reduction.



#### [Ms. Wahlström]

I first got involved in disaster related area of work with the Red Cross, where I was engaged in disaster response and relief activities for many years. After I had worked at OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) for several years, I was ready to contribute to disaster preparedness and risk reduction, and began work for the UNISDR (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction). Since started in UNISDR, I have been advocating for both local and global leaders to consider disasters, not as events, but as development challenges within a larger framework for sustainable development. My current role in the UNISDR is to ensure that there is acceleration in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

**[Mr. Oshima]**

I worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, where I was involved for a relatively long time in development assistance and technical cooperation for developing areas. I then engaged in similar tasks at JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), which now manages practical business relating the to



dispatch of the Japan Disaster Relief Team. I carried out various tasks, such as different responses to emergency disasters, rehabilitation and reconstruction, ODA-related business, and disaster prevention and reduction through JICA. Outside Japan, I served as a United Nations Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs at the beginning of the 21st century and was directly in charge of two bureaus: OCHA and UNISDR, at which Ms. Margareta Wahlström worked. Currently I am involved in emergency assistance and disaster prevention relating to nuclear accidents, though they are relatively specific tasks.

**[Mr. Iokibe]**

Ms. Wahlström frequently visited disaster affected areas including Tohoku region hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Could you give us your impressions and comments, as well as your opinions about the reconstruction process over the year and a half since the earthquake occurred?

**[Ms. Wahlström]**

Disasters foster great emotion and distress as well as a feeling of isolation. Since I began working in this field the overall situations of the government, communities and international societies have been rapidly improved and their systems enhanced. There has been improvement in terms of rapid response, organization and communication, and people have expanded their understanding of what initial reactions are necessary. The critical moment comes when the planning for recovery and rebuilding, this is where gaps are visible.

A few years ago, when I talked with earthquake victims and their family members in Kobe, the most notable things they said about their experiences was not to do with the collapse of bridges, roads and houses or even the earthquake itself. The two key things

that they remembered was the sense of being abandoned and impact the earthquake had on their lives in terms of social and economic impacts, such as long-term unemployment and sometimes domestic violence.

A major challenge here is anticipating recovery and reconstruction planning. It is important to understand that this is a process, not necessarily a plan. The second challenge for any government in recovery and reconstruction is finding a balance between speedy recovery and participation of the communities affected. When the government plays a strong leadership role in recovery it is a quick process, however people feel that they are not participating in rehabilitation and reconstruction. On the other hand, when community participation is actively encouraged in reconstruction it takes a lot longer which creates frustration. I am not sure if there is a perfect solution for this, but it is important to understand this aspect.

When I visited Japan a few months after the tsunami, the destruction was enormous, small towns shattered and even the enormous infrastructure designed to protect these towns was destroyed. This emphasizes the fragility of lives and societies.

When I returned about a year later

I was impressed with the speed at which the debris was dealt with and the method used, in terms of environmental protection. The first evacuation centers and temporary housing were soon built. In a physical sense, the recovery has been very impressive and can serve as a model for many countries. The difficulty is the balance between speed and participation in reconstruction. From the beginning Sendai City had decided that this would be a participatory process. The Mayor of Sendai City said that 70 percent of the population have decided where they want to live and by the end of this year, 90 percent will have decided. However, the time it takes creates feelings of frustration and uncertainty.



A representative of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the United States visited Tohoku region in December 2011 and said he saw the most formidable operation of clearing and organizing the debris that he had ever seen.

The questions which are being asked now are about participation and local involvement, communication, as well as what knowledge individual's should have to be adequately prepared for a disaster and protect their safety.

**[Mr. Iokibe]**

Although we think that the clearance of debris in affected areas of the Tohoku region has been slow, it seems to be going rather quickly, compared to the areas struck by Hurricane Katrina. I think that Ms. Wahlström appropriately indicated that the decision-making process was an important issue in building communities, while involving residents. Under the circumstances in which the extent of damage and the reconstruction plans differ depending on the situation, affected communities face difficulties agreeing on whether or not they should move to the hills and how they should promote regional development. If they do not reach agreement, they cannot start reconstruction projects, even though budgets are prepared for them.

I would like to ask two questions of Mr. Oshima, the former U.N. ambassador. First, when natural disasters hit other countries, Japanese people want to provide support by dispatching the Japan Disaster Relief Team of JICA or the Self-Defense Forces, when needed, and by working as volunteers. On the other hand, when they become victims of natural disasters, they are not good at receiving international support. When the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake occurred, they could not receive adequate international assistance because they tried to conduct reconstruction activities on their own. Meanwhile, when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, the government soon decided to receive international assistance. However, victims in the affected areas seemed to feel very embarrassed because they did not know how to effectively receive support from people who came from over 20 different countries. What are your thoughts on this?

**[Mr. Oshima]**

I will tell you three things that I felt regarding the Great East Japan Earthquake.

When the Great East Japan Earthquake hit Japan, a great number of countries offered large-scale support or assistance. As an international rule for such a situation, there is the U.N. General Assembly Resolution 46/182, which was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly around 1991. It says that, in principle, international support in such a disaster should be requested by the affected countries and provided based on an agreement of accepting support. Under this rule, support is requested directly by affected countries or

through OCHA and is provided based on such request.

When developed countries were struck by natural disasters, such as the Great East Japan Earthquake, Hurricane Katrina in the US and the big earthquake in New Zealand, support was not requested. Although they were basically grateful for the expressions of sympathy and solidarity, they wanted to tackle reconstruction activities themselves, because they had funds and technologies for those activities. However, according to natural human emotion, the larger the scale of a natural disaster, the more help people want to offer. Therefore, the rule prescribed by the U.N. is not applied to developed countries.

In actual affected areas, there are many conditions and issues that should be flexibly dealt with. Therefore, we need to do our best within actual frameworks.

I will simply talk about two more things. After emergency response is almost finished, affected areas enter the stage of reconstruction. In most cases, departments in charge of emergency response differ from those involved in rehabilitation and reconstruction. The same thing goes for budgets. Actually, in JICA, the department responsible for emergency assistance differs from those in charge of rehabilitation, reconstruction and disaster prevention. This applies to many countries, including Japan. One problem is that the transition from emergency response to rehabilitation and reconstruction does not go smoothly, partly due to difference in systems and structures. This is called a “gap issue” in a specialized field. It is a pivotal issue that these gaps be closed as much as possible, so that the process from emergency response to rehabilitation and reconstruction can move as smoothly as possible, particularly in developing countries.

Lastly, I will tell you about reconstruction activities. Mr. Iokibe has assumed heavy responsibility as chairman of the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake. I imagine that he has experienced hardship in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected areas. There is a problem in conducting reconstruction activities. Does reconstruction mean that affected areas return to the way they were? Or is the rehabilitation of affected areas equivalent to their reconstruction? Or should we reconstruct affected areas in a creative way? Here, creative reconstruction does not mean that we simply return affected areas to the way they were, but that we incorporate the concept of disaster prevention into reconstruction activities, for example. The expression “building back better” is used for this, internationally. We should

incorporate this concept in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Tohoku region. I remember hearing from Mr. Toshitami Kaihara, the former Governor of Hyogo Prefecture, at a conference, that the mainstream of the reconstruction in Hyogo Prefecture at that time was that everything should be put back to just the way it was. Then, based on accumulated experience, we tended to focus on creative reconstruction. As a result, reconstruction in the Tohoku region is being advanced in a creative way.

**[Mr. Iokibe]**

After I was appointed Chairman of the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, I presented reconstruction plans on the basis of what we discussed with you after the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake. I will tell you two things that would help shape the reconstruction of the Tohoku region, based on experiences in the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake.

First, we received considerable support, not only from around the country but also around the world. In my case, my home was completely destroyed by the earthquake. Three days after the quake, one of my old friends in Hiroshima, where I had first obtained employment, reached me by phone call with great effort. He told me to return to my hometown. If he had told me to evacuate to Hiroshima, I would have declined his offer at all costs. But the words of his child, who was in the first grade of elementary school, who also said, "Come back to your hometown," had a particular impact in my mind. Finally, my wife and two daughters were taken care of by them in Hiroshima. When I visited Hiroshima one month later, I found that they were living very happily. Every morning, a girl in the neighborhood came to take my daughter to school with her. Seeing my daughter walking upstairs happily with the girl, I was moved to tears to feel the warmth of people in non-affected areas toward victims from Kobe. Although I sometimes felt as if I had been abandoned by others, I was very pleased to be given such warm support. As a result, I felt a strong desire to provide as much support as possible to people in the affected areas of the Great East Japan Earthquake, without abandoning them.

Second, as Mr. Oshima, the former U.N. ambassador, mentioned earlier, at the time of the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake the bureaucracy had so much power that there was a tendency to think that government money could be put into the rehabilitation of affected areas, but should not be spent to make them better than before. Under the

doctrine of Mr. Masaharu Gotoda, people thought that Kobe, which had been prosperous compared to other cities, should not be more prosperous than other areas as a result of support provided for earthquake recovery. They thought that this would violate the fairness of the country.

When we sought approval for a special economic zone for Kobe, our demand was strongly rejected because the consistency of the legal structure could not be destroyed. As a chairman of the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, I think that we should not repeat a similar mistake. We should do our best to make the Tohoku region a model for creative reconstruction, under which affected areas will be special zones suitable for aging societies and equipped with renewable energy.

In terms of safety, the decisive countermeasures against tsunamis are those that enable us to escape and survive. Traditionally, three-quarters of the expenses for collective relocation of residents have been borne by the national government, the remaining one-quarter by local governments.



This time, however, the national government, at its discretion, decided to pay all the expenses of collective relocation because local governments could not afford to. It takes a great deal of money. Therefore, the reconstruction tax was introduced for the first time in history of the Japanese tax system.

At our reconstruction conference, some people insisted that the tax increase should be completely unacceptable. However, it was finally agreed on, in terms of sharing the burden of the earthquake among all contemporary Japanese people. This was the first such attempt in Japan. Ms. Wahlström, what do you think about this from a global viewpoint?

**[Ms. Wahlström]**

I am very impressed with how Japan has financed the reconstruction, because we cannot impose this burden on future generations. This point of argument is similar to what we

observe in climate change related discussions. Italy is most exposed to disasters in Europe. They experienced recently two earthquakes in the most productive part of the country which had a great economic impact on the region. The Italian national government passed new legislation stipulating that the expenses for reconstruction and recovery will no longer be paid for by the central government after the 60 day post-disaster period. After this time, the responsibility should be borne by local governments. In comparison, the Japanese government and treasury have covered all costs relating to the GEJE which was very generous. Here we can see decentralization of authority and responsibility, as well as the clear recognition that it is not economically and financially feasible for the central government to entirely fund recovery and reconstruction. Hence, there is the need for new instrument. This is being discussed in G20, OECD and G8. I believe this topic will see rapid evolution in coming years.

**[Mr. Iokibe]**

As you know, some developing countries have recently suffered natural disasters, which are disturbing their development. These countries have to spend much money from their limited financial resources in order to address the damage that they are currently suffering. In these situations, they cannot use their budget for disasters that may occur in the future. This is the same for Japan, as well. Only Shizuoka Prefecture spends money on full preparations for major future disasters. It has invested more than two trillion yen in disaster prevention countermeasures over 30 years, on the assumption that the Tokai earthquake will definitely occur.

At the national level, the government is on the verge of fully allocating the national budget to disaster prevention countermeasures, because the Tokyo Metropolitan Epicentral Earthquake or the Tokai, Tonankai or Nankai Earthquakes are anticipated to hit Japan after the Great East Japan Earthquake. Although it takes much money to restore the damage caused by disasters, the amount necessary for preventive measures is only one-fifth or one-tenth of the restoration cost. What is the global trend about proactive measures?

**[Ms. Wahlström]**

I think on one level the mental component of preparedness for disasters is quite strong in terms of attention paid to disasters and increasing understanding of their destructive nature. However, what we need to do is to change policies, practices or institutional issues to address this. There is a strong need to steer this change. This is where the Hyogo Framework for Action and U.N. General Assembly Resolution are important,



and where countries need to make decisions together to shift policies so that individual countries are supported in a way to influence politically and to motivate each other. Global, regional, sub-regional, and bilateral co-operation among countries is extremely important to encourage change in this area.

There are a few problems which need to be addressed. One is the belief that disaster risk reduction costs a lot of money. While it may cost a little more, there is evidence that the increase on the original cost is marginal. For example, building a safe school may only result in a cost increase of only one percent. Moreover, building techniques are rapidly advancing. There is an opportunity for the infrastructure which is being built today to be safe and reduce disaster risk in the future.

On the other hand, there is a human issue. Human beings are sometimes quite irrational in decision making. What is important in crisis management or future planning is learning how to deal with these human factors. Nobody wants to imagine that awful major disasters will occur in the future. So some professionals have the responsibility to provide guidance here. We also need to have a better understanding of personal incentives and motivation which encourage individuals to follow this guidance and prepare for disasters.

**[Mr. Iokibe]**

What are important issues regarding international disaster prevention?

**[Mr. Oshima]**

It is often said that prevention is more important than cure. When I look back, disaster prevention and reduction efforts started full scale at the international level in the 1990s, when the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction was launched. As far as I remember, Mr. Waltzron, an expert in Sweden, started to say, "Prevention is better than cure." This has become a motto and led to the current trend in disaster prevention. I would rather say that prevention is cheaper than cure, not better.

Development is also closely related to disaster prevention. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without disaster prevention. In addition, various concepts - including the Hyogo Framework for Action - have been formed. The problem is that these concepts cannot be easily embodied. In the end, we have to face money issues. The introduction of disaster prevention measures can add value to areas. In Japan, however, we have difficulty obtaining an understanding of the cost of disaster

prevention measures leading to adding value and acquiring budgets for disaster prevention from the finance authority.

Specifically, if disaster prevention is too costly, we have to consider how to reinforce disaster prevention capability on a smaller budget at the national or community level. There have been various discussions about this. For example, the introduction of objective criteria and indicators is discussed, to clearly explain what beneficial effects can be achieved by investment in disaster prevention. Based on such criteria and indicators, we need to emphasize the importance of disaster prevention domestically, to persuade the finance authority of the government. Since their introduction does not seem to be so easy even to my amateur eyes, we need to study it more closely.

In addition, there is the traditional wisdom to improve disaster prevention capability at low cost. In Japan, we have river banks called “*Shingen Tsutsumi*.” I think that we should discover such useful wisdom for disaster prevention requiring only small budgets, to introduce to local governments and communities, disseminate information and set it into action.

**[Mr. Iokibe]**

Lastly, Ms. Wahlström, could you tell us about the role of Japan or the role of Kobe, which is home to many functions, in the current situation, in which natural disasters have become a more urgent and serious issue.

**[Ms. Wahlström]**

First of all, I would like to extend my appreciation to Japan for having played a leading role in developing disaster reduction internationally for the last decade. Japan has provided support to many countries through its ODA who are grateful for the support of Japan and JICA, as this assistance enabled them to initiate their work in disaster risk reduction. Moreover, the continued contribution to learning by Kobe City and Hyogo Prefecture after the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, as well as the active collaboration by the Kobe and Hyogo local governments, has been very encouraging to other local governments across the world, this is why city to city learning has become such a powerful instrument.

A few weeks ago I participated in the World Urban Forum, where financial issues were discussed. As a moderator I said that most central governments suffered from a lack of funding, however in my experience, many local government actually are quite affluent. I expected the mayors to deny this, however many acknowledged that they do have

resources and they should be better harnessed for the purpose of disaster risk reduction.

Japan has provided leadership in disaster risk reduction and I would like Japan to continue in this role. The Japanese government has taken the initiative in relation to the Great East Japan Earthquake to question some of the traditional approaches taken in disaster risk management. Traditional techniques and methods for disaster risk reduction have been accumulated in Japan over many decades, however these are now being scrutinized and a change in approach is being considered. This is very important for other countries as well, as this encourages them to consider scrutinizing their own assumptions on disaster risk reduction approaches.

I would like Japan to continue to enforce disaster risk reduction efforts, bearing these two points in mind.

**[Mr. Iokibe]**

In Japan, the Tokyo Metropolitan Epicentral Earthquake is expected to occur with high probability. Moreover, the Uemachi Fault and the Hanaori Fault run through Osaka and Kyoto, respectively. We also realize that we cannot avoid earthquakes and tsunamis in the Tokai, Tonankai and Nankai regions, though we do not know when they will occur.

Even under these circumstances, humans sometimes cannot make rational decisions, as Ms. Wahlström has said, even if they fully understand that the expenses for disaster prevention are much lower than those for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

If we are preoccupied with avoiding individual trees in front of us, we cannot look at the forest from a broader perspective and change our direction. Therefore, I was very impressed by her words, that we need someone who can draw people's attention to the fact that they cannot avoid disasters. In this country, the role of institutions such as the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution, which provide intellectual leadership and foster disaster experts in local communities, has become greater. At the same time, international institutions and intellectual communities should also play an important role in increasing the consciousness of disaster prevention and taking leadership to drastically change our approaches to it.

