

COMMEMORATIVE EVENT- MARCH 11 EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI  
MARCH 26, 2012

SPEECH BY MS. RIA TAITT

Our General host, Ambassador Tezuka and Mrs Tezuka,

Chief Justice Ivor Archie and Mrs Archie,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Surujrattan Rambachan,  
Minister of Trade, Stephen Cadiz,  
Other members of the Cabinet,  
Members of Parliament,  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Other distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I had the honour, pleasure and privilege of visiting Japan between January 27 and February 7 on the invitation of the Japanese Government. The purpose of the trip was to enable journalists to see the efforts at reconstruction, in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami which occurred on March 11, last year. The process of reconstruction is expected to many years, though the most intense period would be over the next four years.

By way of a very well planned, well thought out, and well executed, but hectic and packed programme, I had a firsthand view of the economic, psychological and social impact of this horrendous disaster.

This country- Trinidad and Tobago- has never experienced natural disaster of similar magnitude, occasioning such widespread and tremendous damage. And so this experience was unique for me from two perspectives- a) in the terms of the extensive damage inflicted and b) the response of the Japanese authorities and people in dealing with it.

In visiting the affected areas and talking to the people, I was struck by the fortitude, the resilience and the discipline which they exhibited in the face of adversity.

As I expressed in my article carried in the Express of February 27th : And I now quote "Coming for a country where things tend to turn into ole mass so easily, I sometimes wondered if I was on another planet.

Any society that could have experienced such a mind-boggling catastrophe with the resulting death and destruction without even a single incident of looting, no social unrest, no increase in criminal activity whatsoever, has got to be a remarkable country, comprised of unique people" (end quote).

While this traumatic event has scarred on the psyche of the Japanese people, it was impossible not to be impressed by the determined and resolute manner in which they are overcoming their challenges and learning to move on.

Unlike so many other countries where citizens tend to blame authorities, and to look to the Government to do everything for them. I found in Japan a self-reliance, a willingness on the part of people to pull themselves up by the bootstraps and I found an environment in which the local and community authorities, government institutions, the private sector and civic society organisations were working harmoniously and steadfastly to improve the situation.

Natural disasters can happen anywhere. Tragedies can occur anywhere. And one can never be totally prepared. And while there is no perfect response and perfect behaviour to such episodes, I don't know how many other societies would be able to deal with any major disaster

such as 3/11, in such a calm, measured, efficient and patient way. And because of this I believe that Japan can set an example for the rest of the world in the manner in which they have coped and handled this tragedy.

This has been an eye-opener for me. Ambassador Tezuka, I want to thank you and your government for affording me the opportunity to have this kind of perspective on the event and to witness how a disciplined society treats with its trials and tribulations. It is something which one can only hope this society could emulate.