

Great East Japan Earthquake

Japan awards Rescue South Africa

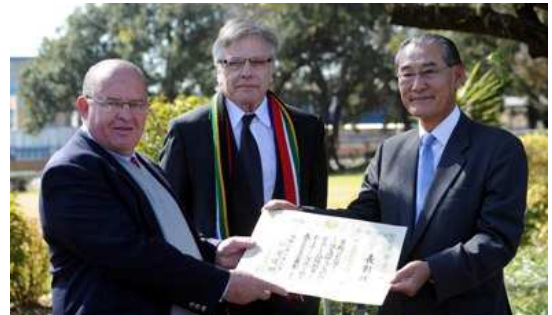
1 August 2011
Embassy of Japan

On 20th July 2011, on behalf of the Government of Japan, Mr. Toshiro Ozawa, the Japanese Ambassador to South Africa, handed over a certificate of commendation and appreciation for the operations conducted by the 45 members of Rescue South Africa following the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 11th March 2011. Ambassador Ozawa also presented cherry blossom trees in commemoration of the 2010 centenary celebrations of Japan – South Africa relations.

1. The ceremony

The ceremony was attended by over 30 members of the Rescue South Africa team (some of whom travelled from the Western Cape and Free State), H.E. Mr Gert Grobler, the South African Ambassador to Japan, officials of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation and representatives of the Japanese community in South Africa.

(1) Ambassador Ozawa reiterated his appreciation and said 'The efforts of Rescue SA have become a symbol of friendship and solidarity between the peoples of Japan and South Africa'. He handed over a certificate of commendation and appreciation and an enlarged group photo of the rescue team, taken at their departure from OR Tambo international airport.



(From left) Mr. Scher, Amb. Grobler and Amb. Ozawa

(2) Ambassador Grobler expressed his pride in the team

for the operations under very challenging circumstances and said 'Japan has never hesitated to help the countries in need and that is why South Africa and other international community immediately went to Japan after the earthquake and tsunami to assist them.

(3) The children of the Japanese School in Johannesburg, who all wore Samurai-blue soccer jerseys after the Japanese Ladies team 'Nadeshiko Japan' won the FIFA world cup, also expressed their appreciation to the members of Rescue South Africa. The children told the audience that after four months since the disaster, Japan was showing its energy and strength as can be seen in the Ladies Team winning the FIFA world cup. They also presented a collection of 'Thank you' messages from children of the Japanese School to Mr. Ian Scher, the CEO of Rescue South Africa.



(4) In response, Mr. Scher expressed his appreciation by saying that this had been the first time to receive such recognition from the recipient country in the last 8 rescue



missions abroad. He told the audience that he and his team

were very impressed with the polite and respectful attitude of the Japanese people despite their hardship.

2. Friendship and solidarity between the peoples of Japan and South Africa

Though the ceremony was for only a short period of time, the members of the rescue team gathered seemed to be enjoying meeting with each other once again. The Embassy informed the team members that support from South Africa is continuing after the team's dispatch to Japan (e.g. a group from 'Drum Café' is currently in Japan and encouraging the people affected by the disaster through 'interactive drumming' and a group of students from Stellenbosch University went to the affected areas in Japan as volunteers to help local people remove rubble during their school holidays.)



Mr. Colin Deiner, the team leader during the mission in Japan, also expressed his appreciation of the award and sent best wishes to the people of Japan for their recovery and rebuilding of the areas affected. Many of the team members expressed their wishes to revisit Japan as tourists to see the restored beauties of the areas where they conducted rescue operations.

(Photographs: Felix Dlangamandla)