

## Press Release

Embassy of Japan

29 April 2021

### **2021 Spring Conferment of Decoration from Japan The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette Mr. Ian Michael Scher**

Mr. Ian Michael Scher, the CEO of Rescue South Africa (RSA, a Non-Governmental Organisation), was instrumental in forming the South African rescue team at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake on 11 March 2011. He also led the activities of the team at the affected sites in Japan. As the first emergency rescue team ever dispatched from Africa to Japan, the team conducted rescue operations in several cities in Miyagi Prefecture including Iwanuma City.

The Team conducted activities that were genuinely helpful for the people in the affected areas, taking fully into account their distress. Its discipline, organisation, responsible manner, professionalism and the spirit of humanity, drew voices of high appreciation and gratitude from local police and residents.

The activities of the Team led by Mr. Scher were widely publicised throughout Iwanuma City, and 10 years later, the City is now “Arigato” Host Town for Supporting Reconstruction for the South African team for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics this year. Furthermore, grassroots exchanges have been continuing which include the visit of the Mayor of Iwanuma City to South Africa in 2020 and the delivery of a traditional Tanabata gift wholeheartedly made by people of Iwanuma City to the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) and South Africa’s schoolchildren, as a gesture of friendship to South Africa that has seen a number of people infected by COVID-19.

The activities of Mr. Scher has contributed to the enhancement of friendship between Japan and South Africa. In 2013, the Government of South Africa issued commemoration stamps with a motive of RSA’s rescue activities in Japan in recognition of the activities of RSA. Furthermore, in 2016, the Government of South Africa presented the Ubuntu Award to RSA as an organisation which positively contributed to diplomatic relations.

Mr. Scher has also been working beyond national borders to strengthen disaster prevention, disaster relief and international disaster prevention capacity. As a part of his activities, he has been continuously promoting internationally the experiences gained from the Great East Japan Earthquake and the disaster prevention technologies learned during his subsequent visits to Japan, thereby demonstrating Japan's knowledge on disaster prevention and its proactive stance on international cooperation.

Such knowledge he has proactively shared with those who are concerned includes:

- a large scale set of training equipment for training of the Japan Disaster Relief team located in a prefectural emergency management and training centre in Japan. Based on this, Mr. Scher installed the same kind of set in the training facility for emergency medical technicians of the University of Johannesburg;
- The discipline of Japanese police and fire departments in the face of large-scale disaster;
- The rapid reconstruction of roads immediately after the disaster, and
- The utilisation of highway service areas as ad hoc headquarters of disaster relief response teams

Mr. Scher made the most of the knowledge obtained from Japan, by building the capacity of emergency response capability for Southern African countries through the project implemented during 2012-2018 supported by, amongst others, Japan, the United States and the United Nations. He shared basic knowledge on disaster prevention and ambulance activities together with lessons and knowledge obtained from disaster relief activities and viewing of the affected areas and led trainings for firefighters and ambulance personnel. The knowledge Mr. Scher has provided has been further made use of and disseminated in a number of countries, thereby contributing to African countries that acutely need capacity building at regional level by building foundations for disaster reduction.

As outlined above, the contribution made by Mr. Scher is outstanding in terms of disseminating Japan's knowledge of disaster prevention and its contribution to international community during the past years.

Dates and arrangement of the conferment ceremony will be decided in due course.

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