

Japan, It is Time to Rise Up!

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Japan is in crisis; it cannot be denied. Our population is decreasing, the general population and workforce are aging, and the birth rate is declining. It will progress to the point that the gross domestic product will decline and hollowing out industry. It will have a negative effect on the economy, which will further burden the social security system. We must also confront the issues of energy, territory, and health care. The problems we're facing are serious and many; they can't be solved easily or in a short span of time.

But recall our history. We all know the crisis Japan has faced in the past, but our ancestors fought on and brought prosperity to Japan. But I'm afraid people of the present can't overcome our obstacles. Why? Because there's something missing that people of the past century had, and people of this century don't have. It is responsibility. It's not the government's fault that this country's in crisis—it's a result of our selfish ways; it's us, the irresponsible people. Too many people say that the real change comes when good government that's formed by good ministers works. But I say: it comes when everyone of this country pulls together, comes together, and works together—when we all exercise our responsibility to ourselves and to our country. In 1961, President Kennedy said to his citizens: ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. That is the responsibility we need.

What are the people doing to solve our problems now? Since entering the 21st century, the number of people who vote has decreased. It's about 60% these days, almost two in five people don't vote—don't try to influence the politics. They completely forget about their responsibilities as citizens of a democratic nation. Their excuses are usually like these: voting rights are optional, whether we exercise them or not is what we decide. But to those who think this way, my message is this: you can't complain about what happens. It is your choice, but you should understand your responsibility.

Welfare dependence is also increasing. If you really cannot work, the government should take care of you—but there've been cases of people receiving welfare even though they don't need it, or because they haven't paid pensions or insurance. They are the ones who drain our economy. If it weren't for those selfish and irresponsible people, comprehensive reform of tax and social security would not have been as necessary as it is now.

We see news programmes every day about politics, and we criticise the government relentlessly. Some of us even say that all politicians do is stagnant politics and that they do nothing good for us. They receive so much pay though they're unproductive. We say they should've cut their pay before raising our taxes. I disagree. Do we do anything to protect this country? No! Do we do anything to improve this country? No! Do we spend any time doing something for this country? No! It is really rude and insensitive that we complain about those who fight every day for our country.

I've been quite critical, but there's no time to be negative. Last year, in March, a giant earthquake pounded the Tohoku region, and many valuable lives were lost. But we recognised something really important, didn't we? We've found our spirit in what we call "*Kizuna*"—the bonds of solidarity between friends and neighbours; bonds which cannot be broken. And at this moment, a moment to shape our generation properly, it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit all of us. Let us be people who can support each other, help each other, and can achieve great things by everyone making an effort.

So who? Who has to pull this country up from the worst crisis? It is our generation who must fix it properly. Remember, we, the teenagers will be the ones who must take this roll. I certainly came here hoping to win a prize—but I want to appeal to all of you to recognise the tasks of our generation. What better place to deliver this message than where many junior high students from all of Osaka gather? So be passionate, rise up, and show the world our great fight. The time of exercising our irresponsibility, protecting our narrow interests, individual benefits—it has already passed. What's required of us today is more courage, more passion, more confidence, and most of all more strength to realise our potential. So let us pull together, work together, and let us together lead Japan to better days ahead. Thank you all.