

“Visible” International Contribution Sought

– Japan Proactive in Aiding Tsunami-Hit Areas –

“Tsunami” has now become a common word in the world in the wake of the massive earthquake off Indonesia’s Sumatra Island and subsequent killer tidal waves that resulted in more than 300,000 deaths. This reflects growing international calls for quake-prone Japan to offer its long years of experience and expertise concerning seismic activities.

Responding to such requests, the Japanese government pledged \$500 million in grants for emergency relief soon after the disaster. The quick response from Japan spurred Australia and Germany to follow suit. Expressing appreciation for the Japanese pledge, Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda said the Japanese action helped set the overall scale of international assistance. Singaporean Foreign Minister George Yeo said Japan exerted leadership in the global efforts to cope with the tsunami disaster,

prompting European nations and other countries to join such contributions.

Japan’s initiatives were not limited to financial assistance. The UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction was held in Kobe in January. Participants at the conference agreed to support UN-led efforts to promptly set up a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean. Based on the agreement, the Japan Meteorological Agency, together with the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii, has decided to start supplying information on the monitoring of tsunamis to the Indian coastal countries. The two institutions will release the news on whether or not warnings are necessary when quakes of magnitude 7 or above occur, even if Japan is not directly affected by such temblors.

The UN Global Review of Disaster Reduction Initiatives shows that wind and

flood damage caused more than 60% of the global deaths stemming from natural disasters that have occurred in the past 30 years. Damage from quakes and volcanic eruptions accounts for 30%. Some critics point out, however, that international assistance for natural disaster-hit areas has focused largely on emergency relief and more priority should be given to the “invisible” area of disaster preparedness.

Japan often faces calls for the need to make international contributions “with a human face,” not just monetary contributions. The latest quake and tsunami catastrophe in the Indian Ocean has reminded the Japanese people of the importance of Japan playing a leading role in fostering experts as a way to forestall disasters, offering its technological know-how to cope with typhoons and floods, as well as quakes and tsunamis.