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As March 11 Nears

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A year has almost passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake. I cannot but still grieve for all the people who lost family members, friends, homes and more, many living now as evacuees.

The accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station of the Tokyo Electric Power Co., Inc. (TEPCO) inflicted severe damage on local communities that had grown up around the station, seriously disrupting lives and throwing people into turmoil. It had, beyond that, major national and international consequences.

As promoters of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, we had to face squarely and accept that so many people, including those who had supported nuclear power for many years, are now in very difficult situations. We sincerely apologize.

“Without recovery of Fukushima, there is no future for nuclear power in Japan” – this is the commitment of the nuclear industry. We will devote ourselves entirely to restoration of municipalities around the station and to decommissioning the reactors.

In order for Japan to continue nuclear power generation, it is obvious that no similar accident must ever occur again. The lessons of the accident will be learned and safety will be optimized. Various bodies, including the government administration and the Diet, are investigating and verifying the accident, while the nuclear industry has analyzed and verified it on its own and all utility companies have already strengthened safety measures at their individual plants. In addition, given that utilities are primarily responsible for ensuring nuclear safety, and based on lessons learned from the accident,

the utility companies will proactively endeavor to improve and ensure nuclear safety. A new organization will also be established to help strengthen safety at nuclear power plants, including severe accident measures, will be enhanced fundamentally, endeavoring thus to recover public trust.

Nationally, the government is reforming its regulatory system to improve its capabilities, and also to restore trust in nuclear safety administration. In order to improve effectiveness of safety regulation based on what has been learned from the accident, the quality in regulation must be changed, including meeting with global standards – for example, safety principles of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and pursuit of scientific, rational judgments based on risk information. The new regulatory body must have its independence guaranteed.

The accident at Fukushima greatly damaged people's trust in safety of nuclear power. Electricity normally generated by nuclear energy – about 30% of total generated electricity, making nuclear a key power source – is at the moment being provided by thermal power, from units that had been suspended but were restarted as an emergency measure. The prices of fossil fuels have been rising and supply is vulnerable to the situation in the Middle East. It is obviously important that people and industries make further efforts to conserve energy. In all, however, we must not fail to recognize that the foundation for our electricity supply, which supports our sophisticated lifestyles and advanced industry, is now very fragile.

From the viewpoint of combating global warming by controlling CO₂ emissions, dependence on fossil fuels will have to be reduced. Solar and wind power, which are renewable energies that do not emit CO₂, should be introduced as much as possible, but they cannot immediately play the role that a primary power source, nuclear power, has played.

For all of these reasons, I think the nuclear power plants that are suspended for periodic inspections, and whose safety has been reaffirmed, should be restarted promptly after the national government and their operators

explain their safety, importance, etc., precisely and carefully, to, and obtain the understanding of, the people nationally and in the siting areas.

In light of the seriousness of the damage from the accident and people's feelings against nuclear generation, debates on reviewing energy policy are in the direction of reducing dependence on nuclear power. Energy, however, underlies people's lives as well as industrial and economic activities – the nation itself. Thus, energy policy will have to be decided based on a long, international perspective, hard data, and after exhaustive discussions in a cool manner – all so as to simultaneously achieve the multiple goals of safety, stable supply, low-carbon emissions, economy and more.

The nuclear industry believes that maintaining nuclear power generation is important for the future of Japan in respect of energy security, environmental compatibility and economic efficiency. For this, we in the industry must take to heart the results of accident investigations and ask for wisdom both inside and outside the country to further enhance safety and support the recovery of Fukushima. We also have to disclose information as much as possible, contributing to discussions in society. This is the only way to regain trust.

The world is watching us. Where will Japan's energy policy go? For the sake of sustainable growth of our country, we expect a cool, nationwide debate from a long-term perspective and global point of view.