

Oranda-jima and Yamada-machi; a Match of Centuries

Impressions of a PA International Foundation visit including several industries to Yamada-machi, a small fishermen's town that was partly wiped off the earth during the 11 March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

A new 'Oranda-jima NPO' will be established soon. Enough funding has already been acquired to build within two months a Child Play and Support Centre that will also host elderly. The new building on safe ground will increasingly assist civic society recovery. These operations will be managed by the NPO and local authorities for two years after which the entire activity will continue as a 'Japan-Netherlands Friendship House'. Additional funding of another 400,000 euro is needed to equip and manage the Centre for two years. All major donors and Child Welfare Expert Prof Akemi Morita reside in the NPO Board. No funding is wasted.

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The first loud explosion lifts the Mayor's office. The second bang makes it tremble intensely. Children who flocked to a drumband performance in the street shout in panic. Our discussion stops. As in trance the Deputy Mayor stands up and puts on an emergency news channel.

False alarm. Today's first aftershock is 4.1 and the second 5.3 on Richter's scale. The band plays on, the music finding its way over an eerie area of several square kilometers of totally flattened life. Only a few who once lived between the sea and the Town Hall survived.

That horrible 11th March took the people of Yamada-machi by surprise. Japan's most experienced and traditional fishermen, cherishing the sea as their source of life, now pay a death toll to it. 925 of their 19,000 citizens died or are missing. 2,884 survive in schools and halls; 1,399 live in broken houses.

Koei Abe is on the list of missing persons. So the President of the Yamada Town Japan-Holland Friendship Society Satoshi Ito is totally surprised. "You are not dead!" he shouts. Indeed Koei Abe is alive and kicking. "I may have lost my office but my cousin has a piece of land in the safe zone," he says. "He is also a Rotarian. He is willing to give away his land for free to your Foundation, so that you can build the Child Play and Care Centre there".

Koei Abe and his family have clearly reached the top of our rapidly growing list of friends in Yamada-machi. 63 and formally retired, he still is the Chairman of Yamada's Rotary Club and of the local Chamber of Commerce. Having lost his office he is suffering himself. But he wants to be of assistance to others. 'Service above self' is Rotary's motto. He and his cousin are living up to it.

While walking through the totally devastated area Jan Remie, RABO Bank's General Manager in Japan, finds a piano. It somehow survived the tsunami in one piece and overlooks the emptiness. It looks like a theater that was deserted by the orchestra except for the piano. Just as in Aceh, the flattened houses smell like death; yet radios, puppets, a hairdryer betray there must have been much life. Jan is silent, but he speaks when asked about his Bank's commitment. 100,000 euro, free expert support of caring colleagues, and perhaps a micro-finance unit. The authorities are impressed. "Your visit and help is vitamin I", says Deputy Mayor Shoichi Sato. *"I mean I from my heart to your heart"*.

"I have been here for 18 years. This is a fantastic country. In the weekend I grow carrots and potatoes in the mountains and I feel close to the local people. As a businessman I have many friends in Tokyo and I share my vegetables with them and with those in need. So I know a bit about Japan. But this is horrible." Wolter Veenhoven wears a dark blue striped suit because he left his Tokyo office in a hurry. His appearance is a bit odd amidst boats on rooftops, houses floating in water and completely destroyed cars swept against the rocks as by God's broom. He has to suppress his emotion when he tells the Mayor why he and 50 other Dutch friends of the 'Trekpaert Foundation' give a donation of 70,000 euro to the Child Centre.

Last week PA International Board Member and former Environment Minister Wakako Hironaka met Mayor Kiichi Numazaki in his office. She informed him of the plan to build a centre for those children that are now and for the foreseeable future living in shelters or in small emergency homes. *"They have no room to play, and often suffer in silence not understanding why family members and friends have left them. The problem starts when they stop crying; such growing traumas must be addressed. Of course the authorities must prioritise reconstruction. You need to build 2,000 emergency houses. But please allow us to come up for the children. Together with UNICEF Japan and local experts we can help inspire and encourage them in their own perfectly equipped space"*.

The Mayor had looked very tired and burdened. He has so many things to do. The entire Elderly Home at the sea side has disappeared. "Can you include them in your plans?" His senior advisers tell us that the choices are painful. "It is not the first time that we are hit by a tsunami. It is the second time that the Mayor lost his own house. And we can't rebuild again in the low areas near the sea. So we must flatten the mountains to rebuild our city on safe ground. But that is very expensive, also because when you remove the rocks the soil to build on cannot be stabilized easily."

Today the Mayor appears stronger, and more optimistic. He notes that the House will also include a facility for the elderly who may wish to work with the children. "Can they take a bath in this home?" he asks. "Yes, we can build it that way, says Martin van der Linden. He is a Dutch architect with experience in developing public schools and facilities for Japanese authorities. He will be responsible for drawings, the programme of requirements and buy-ins, free of charge.

When the Mayor hears that the children and elderly will be provided with special foods, rich in vitamins and nutrients, provided for free by another major Dutch donor, DSM, that already agreed to donate 100,000 euro, he takes a firm decision: *"The Child facility will be built simultaneously with the emergency homes"*. We are happy.

His decision is strongly supported by LDP Senator Otsuji and DPJ Senator Yasui. Iwate Governor Tasso reflects this when he expresses his gratitude and support for this project. "This is also a good example for other cities and regions", he says. "The children are important, they are our future. And

it is rather special that among the many international donors so many Dutchmen come to Yamada-machi. When you came here for the first time, in 1643, we were a closed country. Foreigners were not so welcome. But you were allowed to stay on the small island in Yamada-machi's bay that is now called 'Oranda-jima', or 'Holland Island'. You come with good ideas, and I will certainly call on your technical expertise as we have many problems to address. It is not only that we must find a way to recover, but we must also change. Our economy must modernize and we look forward to further cooperation." Back in Tokyo, Vice Minister Kaname Tadjima of Economy, Trade and Industry is also happy with the Dutch input. "But we also need to sign a Free Trade Agreement with Europe, fast, and certainly under the current circumstances." He is right. If industrial leaders like DSM Japan President Leon Halders take the lead in bringing Dutch and other industries to Yamada-machi, Japanese counterparts should be assisted to lead Japanese industries to Europe. Obviously the 11 March earthquake is a horrible event. Many Japanese still live in fear with daily aftershocks and with sharply reduced income. But the disaster does serve a purpose if it makes Europe and Japan, after all these centuries, grow closer. That cannot be accomplished by trade and investment only. Of course The Netherlands and the EU have much to share in terms of water technology, agricultural innovation and exchange in every thinkable area. What must be added is vitamin *I*, from heart to heart. If not now, when, asked Martin Luther King once. You please answer now.

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