

Speech by Irene Hirano Inouye, President, U.S.–Japan Council [U.S.A.]

Your Royal Highness, Princess Takamado, Ambassador Ando and all of the distinguished guests, I am deeply honored to receive this prestigious award from the Japan Foundation. As I look around the room, it is wonderful to see so many friends and colleagues who are here this evening. And I am very pleased that my husband, Senator Daniel Inouye, was able to re-arrange his schedule to join me in Tokyo this week. I am sure, Ambassador Kato, that he is pleased to be able to eat real Japanese food and not frozen Japanese food. I want to thank Ambassador Kato for the very kind introduction, and I am grateful for our many years of friendship.

It was during my work at the Japanese American National Museum, that I continually began to hear from many Sansei that they had never visited Japan nor were they interested in learning about Japan. Although my experience was very different from most Sansei, their personal history started with the life of their Issei grand-parents in the United States, not before that. Their knowledge and connection to Japan was limited at best.

Through my work at the National Museum and now with the U.S.–Japan Council, I have had the opportunity to connect many Japanese Americans with their heritage. Through programs like the Japanese American Leadership Delegation, which has been supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan Foundation, we have been able to bring nearly 150 Japanese Americans to Japan and I have personally witnessed the transformation of Sansei and Yonsei who came to Japan, sometimes for the first time through these programs. Princess Takamado, who since 2000 has met with every single group that has come, is a very special part of that program. Those Japanese Americans have become strong contributors to building and strengthening the U.S.–Japan relationship. And I believe that this is an important investment that will continue to multiply for years to come.

I am so honored that Ambassador John Roos is here this evening. Following the 3.11 disasters, I was given the unique opportunity to work with the Ambassador and an extraordinary team of people at the US Embassy and at the US–Japan Council to begin the TOMODACHI Initiative. We believe that we can create a new generation, a very strong TOMODACHI generation, of young Americans and young

Japanese who will ensure that the long term vitality of our US–Japan relationship continues. It is through the investment and support of many American and Japanese cooperate donors with the support of the Japanese government that this program has now begun. For me, this also includes young Japanese Americans, who can also become part of that TOMODACHI generation.

I have spent my career working in the non–profit sector and was fortunate to be given the opportunity to contribute to the land of my birth and to the land of my ancestry. Along that journey I have met many wonderful and dedicated people who I believe, like me, that we can make a small difference.

Perhaps it is my Japanese ancestry and the values of my Issei grandparents, that makes me very reluctant to receive any personal acknowledgement for my work. But I am very happy to accept this award on behalf of the many, many people who worked hard to make the impossible – very possible. The building of the Japanese American National Museum, the creation of the new and dynamic U.S.–Japan Council and the creation of the TOMODACHI initiative – all significant contributors to the important work of ensuring a strong and vibrant relationship between the United States and Japan.

The scientist Jonas Salk said, “I feel the greatest reward for doing is the opportunity to do more.”

I look forward to continuing my work with so many of you in being able to do more. I am humbled and I thank the Japan Foundation for this honor.

Thank you.