

Speech by Ryozo Kato, Member of the Board, Mitsubishi Corporation

Your Imperial Highnesses The Crown Prince, Ladies and gentlemen,
My name is Ryozo Kato. I have been given the honor of introducing Irene Hirano, one of the award winners this year.

I have been hearing the word “Japanese American” ever since I was a small child. Especially since the mid-19 century, Japanese people and Japanese Americans, each in their own ways, have undergone a period of history that included pain and hardship.

Japan’s rapid post-war economic recovery, which has often been called a miracle, has been made possible only with the support of Japanese Americans. (Specific company names: Toyota Motor, Sony, Honda Motor, Canon, others)

For 43 years since the middle of the 1960s through mid-2008, I was involved in projects that dealt mainly in Japan-U.S. relations. The consistent impression I gained through my work in these years is that the position of Japanese Americans in the U.S., the superpower, and the position of Japan in the international community are strikingly similar. The population of Japanese Americans in the United States, which has been steady at about one million, has long been (and far) outstripped by Chinese, South Korean, Vietnamese and Philippine Americans. Nevertheless, the reputation of Japanese Americans has remained extremely high.

Many people think Japanese Americans in general have remarkable virtues and that such of their qualities as industriousness, precision, honesty, fairness and reliability are first-class. In addition, the speed and degree of their integration and assimilation in U.S. society have been both fast and high.

It is only natural that all these qualities have enabled Japanese Americans to acquire high social positions in the United States despite their relatively small number.

Japan has also received a similar assessment in the international community, especially in the post-war years, and I believe that this will remain unchanged in the future.

And among those leading Japanese Americans who have left indelible and lasting achievements is Irene Hirano Inouye.

I think you are already quite familiar with her accomplishments to date and I will not bother you with all the details. Let me just briefly say that, as the former president and founding CEO of the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles and the current president of the U.S.-Japan Council, she has made not only great short-term and direct contributions to maintaining, developing and deepening the overall relations between Japan and the United States, but also medium- and long-term, indirect and symbolic contributions as well.

Everyone has been deeply impressed and touched by the initiative she undertook to build support for Japan to recover from the devastating earthquake and tsunami last year.

I am not sure if there's enough information on this in the material you have with you, but let me talk here about another important contribution she has made. And this goes beyond the Japan-U.S. relations and involves the stability and prosperity of the entire world, including the Asia-Pacific and Oceanic regions as well as the Middle East.

As you know, Irene's husband, Senator Daniel Inouye, is the President pro tempore, which is the highest position in the U.S. Senate. Under the U.S. Constitution, the Vice President presides over the Senate. That makes Senator Inouye, in effect, No. 1 in the Senate. And should something happen to the President, he is third in line of succession after the Vice President and the Speaker of the House. In addition, Senator Inouye is chairman of the Appropriations Committee, a panel whose awesome name alone is enough to make people tremble in their boots. The Senate inherently has a great deal of influence not only in the domestic politics of the United States but also in the country's diplomatic relations. So, the combination of these two positions—the President pro tempore of the Senate and chairman of its Appropriations Committee—gives Senator Inouye the kind of power that determines the direction of U.S. diplomacy.

According to my reliable sources, Irene has successfully trained this powerful

man to handle a variety of household chores—especially how to use the all-automated washing machine at home as well as the electronic oven to cook oyako-don, katsu-don and various vacuum-packed so-called “retoruto” foods—so her husband can survive even when she is not around. And her vigorous training has guaranteed the United States, indeed the entire world including Japan, that Senator Inouye will be able to exercise his strong and wise power of influence even without Irene. Irene, on her part, can work for a further improvement of trust in the Japan-U.S. relations without worrying about her husband. The very existence of this husband and wife and their teamwork are an irreplaceable blessing and asset for Japan.

In the end, I would like to express my hope, indeed confidence, that the deep mutual understanding and perception sharing between Japan and the United States will not be simply superficial but will make further progress under Irene’s leadership in the future. Thank you.