

A Message from the President

The fiscal year 2008 was a year of political, economic, and social upheaval for Japan and for the world. During such a difficult period in which the global community is faced with a number of challenges, the need for mutual understanding and collaboration among people beyond the boundaries of their own national borders greatly increases. This means that international cultural exchange has an even greater role to play than ever before. With this in mind, we at the Japan Foundation continued to implement our international cultural exchange programs surely and effectively, while making great progress in streamlining our operations as an independent administrative institution.

The population of Japanese learners has been increasing every year. According to our 2006 survey, approximately three million people study the language outside of Japan.* The Japan Foundation, with our proven track record and longstanding commitment, has already been providing leadership in Japanese-language education. Public expectation for us to do more in this regard is only increasing. In response to this, we have worked to develop the JF Standards for Japanese-Language Education in order to provide a core framework for studying and teaching Japanese and evaluating learners' proficiency, and have recently released a pilot edition. We also launched the JF Nihongo Network, also known as the Sakura Network, of core Japanese-language institutions across the world, aiming to build a framework for supporting activities undertaken in each country and region to meet local needs. In addition, we established the Center for Japanese-Language Testing in October 2008, to improve the content of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), ensure the smooth transition from annual to semi-annual JLPT testing, and strengthen the organization for the overall test administration. A total of nearly 560,000 people took the test in 2008.

Intellectual exchange is an important channel through which to develop partnerships through collaborative projects to address global issues. During fiscal 2008, we supported China's efforts to recover from the devastating earthquake in Sichuan Province by sending a volunteer team—the members of which included high school students—and a disaster recovery expert team to the affected area, and by inviting Chinese government officials to Japan to exchange ideas and build network. We also invited future leaders in a variety of fields in Asian countries to visit Japan and learn about our country's efforts to incorporate cultural perspective into city planning by participating in site visits and discussions.

In response to growing interest in increasingly diverse strands of Japanese culture, our programs cover a wide variety of categories, ranging from traditional and contemporary arts, to anime (animation) and culinary culture, and adopt various formats to best suit local needs. Taking another step forward, in fiscal 2008, we also started to work in the area of peace-building through culture. This initiative has invited a fresh examination of the role of culture by highlighting its potential use in addressing today's global challenges, such as the facilitation of recovery efforts in conflict- and disaster-affected areas. We will continue to explore further areas where culture can make positive contributions.

While providing timely, relevant, and effective programs to fulfill social needs, we also recognize the vital importance of—and thus strive to increase—the operational efficiency of our organization. We successfully achieved specific streamlining targets for fiscal 2008, including the reduction of administrative expenditure, which is mainly attributable to the relocation of our headquarters. We also made good progress in optimizing program operations by increasing our organizational flexibility and seeking more collaboration and cooperation with other organizations and businesses.

With the power of culture in the global spotlight, the Japan Foundation will continue to serve as an active provider of effective and efficient programs that meet present societal needs, while never losing sight of the need for ongoing operational reforms. As we continue on our journey, we look forward to your further support.

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* Source: Survey Report on Japanese-Language Education Abroad 2006: Present Condition of Overseas Japanese-Language Education, published by the Japan Foundation in 2007.



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