

The following is a provisional English translation of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's remarks delivered in Japanese. The provisional translation, prepared by the Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles, is supplied as a courtesy and may differ from the language interpretation at the meeting.

## **Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Remarks at Meeting with KAKEHASHI Project Participants (May 2, 2015)**

I am pleased to meet today with KAKEHASHI Project participants. Los Angeles is the last stop of my United States trip, which began on April 26, and it makes me very happy to meet with everyone here on my final day. You are future bridge builders for Japan-U.S. relations.

During your nine-day trip to Japan, I'm sure you met locals when you went to the quake zone, toured Japanese companies, visited outlying areas and experienced everyday life through homestays.

In 1977, I came to Los Angeles to study. My friend, a Chinese American, introduced me to an Italian American with whom I was able to do a homestay. Through this study abroad, I experienced the diversity of the U.S. I believe that all of you were also able to directly experience various aspects of Japan during your nine-day stay. Please utilize what you experienced in those nine days in your lives ahead. Going forward, I hope to be able to arrange more exchanges between Japanese and American youth.

This morning, I spent time with a friend from my time studying here. He drove two hours just to see me. I was deeply moved. When I knew him, he had long hair. But when I saw him (today), he no longer had any hair, so I didn't recognize him at first. Our friendship cultivated when we were younger, however, had not changed. I hope you stay in touch with friends made during your trip to Japan. My old friend said that he never imagined I would someday become Prime Minister of Japan. Someone here may become President of the United States someday. I sincerely hope that you will serve as a bridge between Japan and the U.S, which share the same values, to help deepen our bilateral ties further.

Question from student representative:

Q: What do you believe is the biggest challenge Japan is currently facing? How do you plan to approach it?

A: Japan's population is shrinking and graying. We are implementing different measures, but for the time being, we are unable to drastically change (the situation).

Japan has a universal health care system that requires all citizens to join the national pension system and obtain health insurance, but it is a difficult task to support them. In addition to adopting policies to halt the population decline, Japan needs to think about what is necessary to protect its social insurance system while encouraging vitality. The answer to that is an increase in productivity. Three things are important in order to raise productivity.

Firstly, different innovations should be nurtured, such as a robotic revolution. Secondly, Japan needs as many people as possible to participate in production activities, with women, senior citizens and talented individuals from abroad among those who can participate more in society. Thirdly, a domestic

population decline means a decrease in Japanese consumers. On the other hand, consumers in the Asia Pacific region continue to increase. For that very reason, we need to pursue the Trans-Pacific Partnership and strengthen economic partnerships with nations in the Asia Pacific.

Japan is experiencing numerous changes. If you have an opportunity to visit a year from now, you will see the changes firsthand. I am aware that everyone visited outlying regions of Japan during your nine-day stays. My government will undertake policy measures that aim to revitalize such regions.