



Under Washington's Cherry Blossoms, Americans Stand with Japan

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Wild Geese of Foggy Bottom

In 1912, Japan gave over 3000 cherry trees to America, which were planted along the banks of the Potomac River and the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C. Since the 1930s, the city has held an annual Cherry Blossom Festival. The Festival is one of Washington's biggest attractions, bringing over a million visitors every year to enjoy the flowering trees.



Diana Mayhew, chair of the Cherry Blossom Festival Committee, speaks at the vigil. The Japanese ambassador to the U.S. stands under the Japanese flag. (Jianan Wang)

The cherry blossoms come every year, but this year's Cherry Blossom Festival is different from those in the past. While people admire the blossoms, their thoughts go to the trees' ancestral home, distant Japan, which has just suffered one of the greatest natural disasters in its history. Over 10,000 people died in the 9.0 magnitude earthquake and the pursuant tsunami. The situation at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, which faces meltdown due to loss of electricity during the tsunami, is still

unstable. Even without a nuclear accident, the Japanese economy has already lost over USD 300 billion.

In the face of such enormous disaster and terrible loss of life, the strength and calm of the Japanese people has left a deep impression on the world. The Japanese Self Defense Forces are working tirelessly with rescue teams and experts from around the world to bring order to the affected area. The rescue effort from the United States includes a search-and-rescue team of over 140 people from two cities. America also answered Japan's request for help by sending 12,000 troops to support Operation Tomodachi (Operation "Friend"), the joint U.S.-Japan military relief effort. The U.S. Marine Corps and Navy have used heavy-duty equipment to make paths through the rubble and clear away piles of wreckage from buildings destroyed in the earthquake and tsunami. They have brought relief supplies on ships to places totally cut off by the disaster, while Navy medical ships are treating the injured. Not counting the Red Cross' initial donation of USD 10 million, the American people have given over USD 20 million to the relief effort.



A little girl donates money. (Jianan Wang)

At this time of great concern for Japan, the organizers of the Cherry Blossom Festival held "Stand with Japan," a twilight vigil held on March 24 in an amphitheater south

of the Washington Monument. Over 1000 people came to the event. After the ceremony, the participants walked around the Tidal Basin to show their sympathy and support for the Japanese people.

Although spring has arrived, a cold snap hit Washington during the vigil, and participants bundled up in winter clothes. But the weather did not chill the enthusiasm of the crowd. People poured into the amphitheater, packing themselves in as tightly as possible. Many came with their entire families: mothers pushing strollers, grandfathers holding their granddaughters, teenage students, boy scouts, and girl scouts all hurried in. An endless line trailed to the Red Cross donation booth. A little girl in a pink winter coat earnestly stepped up and put a USD 20 note her mother had given her into the donation box. A group of middle school girls held what looked like Japanese flags, with a heart where the red circle of the sun would be. Some of the girls had painted words of support on their faces. Nippon TV filmed them all, sending the images back home to inspire faith in their country to rebuild.

Chair of the Cherry Blossom Festival Committee Diana Mayhew, Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Ichiro Fujisaki, the chair of the Washington Japan-America Society, former State Department Under-Secretary for South Asian Affairs John Malott, and Washington D.C. Congresswomen Eleanor Holmes Norton all spoke at Stand with Japan. The speakers mentioned the generous contributions of the Japanese people and government to the U.S. after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Now, they said, America is doing for Japan what Japan did for us.

The vigil had ended and the sky had grown dark, but the passion had not died down. The participants lined up to walk the banks of the Tidal Basin. The pink blossoms on those hardy trees turned indigo in the dimming light. Everyone prayed for Japan to conquer this misfortune, to rise anew from this trial, to flourish and prosper as never before.

Watch this touching record of Stand with Japan [here](#).

Read Jianan's article in the original Chinese [here](#).

The [Wild Geese of Foggy Bottom](#) is a Chinese-language blog about life in the United States. The bloggers immigrated from China and now live in the Washington, D.C. area. In Chinese poetry, migrating wild geese symbolize correspondence between far-away friends. Foggy Bottom is the neighborhood where the Department of State is located.



Bundled in pink cherry blossoms, this child also came to support Japan. (Jianan Wang)

Cover photo by Jianan Wang