

## Regarding the Kawabe-Gawa Dam (Summary of the Governor's Statement)

### 1. Introduction

I would like to express my views on the issue of the Kawabe-Gawa dam.

On April 16, 2008, the new Kumamoto Prefectural Government came into power and started turning our dreams into reality. The dream of Governor Kabashima and his government is “to unleash the potential in Kumamoto, to change the prefecture into a place of high spirits and great progress, and to make residents of the prefecture as happy as possible.”

In order to do realize this dream, we need to resolve the issue of the Kawabe-Gawa dam. During the previous election campaign, the other candidates running for governorship expressed their opposition to the construction of the dam. However, I thought it would be irresponsible of me to hastily come to a conclusion without understanding the essence of the issue. Therefore, I promised the people that I would express my views on the construction of the dam at the prefectural assembly in September, 2008, after reviewing the issue for half a year.

Looking back, I realize that the past few months were anguishing, but at the same time, were extremely valuable to me. This is because the issue we are facing is one that is relevant to modern society as a whole. It is an issue that calls into question how we as a society deal with threats to human life from natural disasters, and threats to the environment. In other words, I feel that this is a very difficult task, as our decision may fundamentally change the face of politics and administration.

Now, the time has come for me to announce my decision. As I stand here in front of you, I think of the people representing the various standpoints who have been involved in this issue since the construction plans for the dam were released 42 years ago. I also feel the weight of a decision that will drastically affect the future of the region,

If we look back on the Kawabe-Gawa dam project, we can see that there

has always been a history of difficulties and confrontation.

In the Kuma River basin, major flood disasters occurred in three consecutive years, from 1963 to 1965. A total of more than 20,000 homes were damaged by the floods and residents along the river experienced serious hardship. The Kawabe-Gawa dam project was conceived as a drastic flood control measure to save the lives and properties of the residents living in the basin. Kumamoto Prefecture promoted the construction of the dam in association with the government, from the viewpoint of saving the lives and properties of the residents in the region.

Meanwhile in Itsuki village, there have been repeated mass opposition movements, including lawsuits, for many years. However, the people in Itsuki village finally reached an agreement on the construction of the dam in 1996. As a result, residents of close to 500 households left their homes of many years, and some even left their hometown. It grieves me to think of the agonizing decision many people had to make, and the valuable efforts of concerned parties who agreed to cooperate in this project in spite of the drastic changes to their daily life that the construction of the dam would bring.

In 2001, the residents' group aired their view in public, saying that "it is possible to control floods in the Kuma River without a dam." This led to the start of the "Residents Round-Table Discussion Forum." This unprecedented open forum, joined by both the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) and local residents, was held nine times over a two-year span. Thanks to these discussions, people in Kumamoto prefecture became able to clearly understand the points in question regarding the dam. However, both supporters and opponents of the Kawabe-Gawa dam never reached an agreement, and tension between the two groups ran even deeper than before.

## 2. Discussion at the Knowledge Assembly

Immediately after assuming the office of governor, I set up the Knowledge Assembly, consisting of academic researchers and experts from various

fields of expertise, to ask for their opinions on the issue in order to help me in reaching a decision regarding this issue. At the Knowledge Assembly, members from various fields of expertise, such as river engineering, public administration and conservation ecology, earnestly discussed the issue from diverse standpoints in a scientific and objective manner, without being bound by past discussions.

During the discussion at the Knowledge Assembly, something ground-breaking occurred. I noticed that the members of the discussion had stepped out of the never-ending cycle of discussing “which statistical values regarding flood levels are correct, those of the MLIT or those of the residents’ group.” Until this point, I feel that everyone discussed flood control by focusing on the accuracy of the statistical values of the two parties. In other words, people focused solely on how much we need to reduce and control the peak discharge of the river at Hitoyoshi in order to achieve a safe quantity of flow in the Hitoyoshi area.

However, the Knowledge Assembly pointed out that uncertainty was included in both sets of values, and presented new and important viewpoints. These viewpoints included opinions regarding such questions as what are the advantages and disadvantages of building the dam; how does the future look for the region; how do we deal with climate change in the future; and how do we make a comprehensive plan to cover the entire region?

We confirmed at the Knowledge Assembly that building the Kawabe-Gawa dam would be the most effective measure of flood control in the Kuma River basin from the viewpoint of river engineering. The dam originally planned by the MLIT was designed to prevent floods occurring once every eighty years, and it seems that this plan is still now effective today. This is because Mr. de Bruin from the Netherlands, a hydraulic engineer who was invited as a neutral adviser, holds the same opinion as the MLIT did forty-two years ago.

Among the people opposed to the construction of the dam, some hold the opinion that the construction of the dam will cause more widespread flood damage and that a dam will never be accepted, regardless of its purpose.

However, I cannot agree with them. I do think that it is difficult to control floods that exceed our estimations, but it is possible to hold damage to a minimum by making use of the discharge control function of the dam.

I feel that it is important to take a step back and consider whether each separate dam is really required or not and whether a dam will actually bring benefits to residents or not, instead of simply considering a dam to be a bad thing.

Meanwhile, from an environmental standpoint, residents' groups and others opposed to the dam expressed concerns about the adverse effects of the dam on water quality, river life and rare species of animal, considering this to be the "fatal defect" of the dam. This is the major reason why they are opposed to the dam.

At the same time, the MLIT insisted that "the dam would have no critical effects on the environment" and that "they would take appropriate environmental measures." However, it can be hardly be said that this point of view gains the full understanding of residents. In fact, in addition to the Knowledge Assembly, I have received various opinions which highlight that the construction of the dam may cause environmental damage. I too think that we cannot rule out the possibility of negative effects on the environment caused by the dam.

At the Knowledge Assembly, the experts felt that it is desirable to avoid the construction of large structures like a dam as much as possible, and, if a dam needs to be constructed, it is necessary to make arrangements so that environmental effects may be avoided or reduced as much as possible. Then, putting emphasis on the adverse effects of the dam on the environment, they suggest that it is conceivable to contrive other measures to control floods without building a dam by accepting a certain amount of flood damage.

### 3. My judgment / view

Now, let me express my own views on the issue concerning Kawabe-Gawa dam. Whilst considering the issue, I have repeatedly visited the sites in

question and have heard the opinions of residents of Kumamoto prefecture, including the mayors of the relevant municipalities and the chairpersons and members of the local assemblies. In addition, I have heard details of the basic concept of the river development project from the MLIT, which is the main body behind the project. Any and all opinions and arguments were valuable resources, which helped me reach a decision on this issue.

The original purpose of flood control measures is to protect the lives and properties of local residents living in river basins. In time, the Kuma River, one of the big three rapid streams in Japan, will most likely strike the area in its river basin, threatening the lives and properties of residents. This is why flood control measures are required there. As the administrator of the river, the government fulfills its responsibility toward the people of the area and works hard to systematically maintain the river and its banks. Without a shadow of a doubt, this is a task for the government and the public administration to carry out.

However, are lives and property all that we should protect? We all too easily assume that “protecting lives and properties” means “protecting private homes, personal possessions and public buildings and facilities.” However, whilst listening to the opinions of various people, I have come to believe that for the people in the Hitoyoshi and Kuma regions, the Kuma River itself is an invaluable property and a “treasure” to be protected.

The other day, Mayor Tanaka of Hitoyoshi city expressed his opinion that as a person who was born and raised in the Kuma basin and feels an affinity towards the river, he and the residents in the basin should deal with the restoration of the Kuma River’s natural habitat. He stated that he wants to deal with the matter so that the people in the basin can all receive the benefits that the Kuma River brings and can pass on their “treasure” to our descendants.

Maybe the concept of “protecting the Kuma River, the treasure of our region,” may only be understood by those who were born and raised in the area. This concept, this sense of value, runs contrary to the uniform standard of values throughout the rest of the country. This uniform

standard of values champions “constructing a dam to protect lives and properties.”

I feel that this “local” sense of value is etched deep in the hearts and minds of the residents living in the Kuma River basin. Moreover, respecting this a sense of value will most likely motivate people to protect and develop their own region by themselves. We will need to create more opportunities for people to place importance on such local senses of value if we are to create a genuine local autonomy in this country.

I also think that we should stress the importance of local senses of value when creating an approach to flood control, instead of using standardized measures. I feel that the best way to go about planning flood control measures is to first listen very closely to specific requests regarding the local area from local residents and then to facilitate the project with the understanding of local residents. Under the new river laws, development and maintenance of the environment and opinions in the local community are considered as important. I take this to mean the aforementioned methodology.

In Hitoyoshi city, which is one of the biggest beneficiaries of the Kawabe-Gawa dam, Mayor Tanaka expressed his desire for the existing plans for the dam to be withdrawn. Furthermore, Mr. Tokuda, who is the mayor of Sagara village, a planned construction site of the Kawabe-Gawa dam, stated that he cannot accept the construction of the Kawabe-Gawa dam in its present state. Thereafter, the opinions of mayors of other municipalities in the basin were divided over the construction of the dam.

As just described, I can understand fully the feelings of residents, who want us to cancel construction of the Kawabe-Gawa dam and protect the Kuma River.

By showing respect for residents’ unique sense of value, both the people and the region will shine and a truly affluent society will take shape. When such a society is formed, we can surely say that the happiness of residents has increased.

With this, I have come to the decision that we should withdraw the existing plan for the Kawabe-Gawa dam, and should pursue other flood control measures which do not require the construction of a dam.

As Mr. Masakazu Suzuki, a member of the Knowledge Assembly, pointed out, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) has carried out research and development with keen interest regarding issues derived from the construction of the dam. Meanwhile, it seems that the MLIT has not put as much effort in to devise measures of “flood control without any dam.” Indeed, they dismissed alternative ideas submitted by the residents, such as creating a flood control basin and improving discharge capacity by digging out the riverbed, claiming that there is a problem with digging out the Hitoyoshi layer of the riverbed, and that it is socially difficult to make use of farm land as a flood control reservoir. I think that is the reason why they failed to gain the understanding of the residents.

However, in the future, I will urge the MLIT to pursue plans for “alternative flood control measures without dams” to the utmost, whilst meeting the residents’ needs. For urban areas and areas of high importance, such as town centers, it will be necessary to use a higher level of safety measures than in other areas; when digging into the riverbed, it will be necessary to consider how deep to dig at each individual point so as not to have an adverse effect on the sweetfish and other fish populations; and for the flood control basin, it will be necessary to research into various possibilities regarding the various land ownership forms and normal daily use of the land, without being bound by existing approaches.

The other day, the MLIT submitted a new plan for an environmentally-friendly dam with open holes. This plan was presented without prior notice and it is highly doubtful that they reached a conclusion by pursuing flood control measures without dams. In addition, we have not heard any detailed explanations regarding the dam with open holes from the viewpoints of environmental impacts and technical tasks, amongst others. Therefore, I think it is impossible to discuss the pros and cons of the proposed dam with open holes at the present time.

Furthermore, in order to obtain consent from the residents of Kumamoto prefecture and to pour such an immense amount of tax money into this project in the current financial situation of the prefecture, we must show more clearly that the happiness of residents will increase. Considering residents in the prefecture do not reckon that the MLIT has tried sufficiently hard to create a plan without dams, I cannot approve the current Kawabe-Gawa dam project.

I have announced my conclusion today after carefully considering which option is the best for the residents of the prefecture for both the present and for the near future, in view of changes in the people's will in the past, in the present and in the future.

“The people's will in the past” was when the people wished for flood control by dams to protect their lives and properties against flood damage. “The people's will at the present” shows that the people wish to pursue flood control measures without building dams and wish to protect the existing Kuma River. “The people's will in the future” is beyond our understanding, but the people may need flood control using a dam in the future again, due to drastic environmental changes on the earth, changes in residents' sense of value, a ground-breaking technical innovation, or another such change in circumstance. If such a case arises, then the existing dam site will be used. I believe that this may be of great significance in the future.

#### 4. My message to the people in Itsuki village

The most difficult part of making this decision was deciding how I can meet the feelings of residents in Itsuki village, who have been sent to and fro by the dam issue for almost half a century.

Residents in Itsuki village made an agonizing decision to give up their family homes, ancestral farm lands, sites of ancestral graves and other such important things for the benefit of the safety of the people in the downstream areas. I can just imagine the feelings of those who are concerned about the future of their hometown, where the population of the

village has been decreasing due to almost non-stop migration, and where an aging population and a diminishing number of children born has led to an acceleration in the diminishing population since the plans for the Kawabe-Gawa dam was released.

I belong to the generation that used to sing the Lullaby of Itsuki. As you may know, there are many sorrowful and bitter lyrics in the Lullaby of Itsuki. My mother used to say that she could not attend the higher elementary school and worked as a baby-sitter to support her family, singing the Lullaby of Itsuki. It was during the last campaign that I first visited Itsuki village. Since then, I have visited there several times. Whenever I visited, people in the village, including Mayor Wada, have welcomed me with open arms. I also received heavy support from them in the election, for which I thank them.

Despite this, I grieve over the fact that I, as the governor of the prefecture, could not meet the expectations of mayor Wada and other residents in the village, who have waited and hoped for the dam to be built to bring a boost to their village. I feel very sad, especially when I think of those who have supported me.

However, I think I have to learn the lessons of the history of Itsuki village more than anybody. Admittedly, it will be hard to implement the measures for promoting Itsuki village based on the existing administrative framework. However, I would like to make it clear that as general manager, I am prepared to undertake the task of creating an inspirational new promotion plan for Itsuki village, whilst listening carefully to the opinions expressed by villagers. I intend to do this by taking advantage of the population distribution and the characteristics of the village. I will also urge the government to take necessary measures in association with Kumamoto prefecture.

## 5. Toward our dream in Kumamoto

I have now expressed my intention to pursue flood controls without dams with regard to the issue of Kawabe-Gawa dam. From now on, whilst

pursuing flood controls without dams as much as possible, I would like to develop Kumamoto prefecture as a whole, so that the lives and properties of residents in the basin can be protected and people there can nurture their own dreams in the future.

I sincerely hope that my decision may enhance the brand value of the Hitoyoshi and Kuma areas throughout the nation. Moreover, I hope that my decision will help to enhance the area's value as a tourist resort.

Earlier this year, Aoi Aso Shrine in Hitoyoshi city was designated as a national treasure. This is the first place to be designated as a national treasure in Kumamoto prefecture. Aoi Aso Shrine was chosen as a national treasure because it has an invaluable Azuchi-Momoyama style shrine pavilion and two-storied gate, both in their original form. It seems that some have been tempted to rebuild the Aoi Aso Shrine using modern techniques, but those who have gone before us rejected such notions. People in the Hitoyoshi and Kuma regions can be proud of Aoi Aso Shrine, as it is and will be the core attraction and focal point for regional development.

We are blessed with world-class resources in Kumamoto. Among others, the Kawabe River and Kuma River basins are invaluable properties for the residents in Kumamoto. Now is the time to forget the confrontation of the past forty-two years and to spread the word about the value of the Hitoyoshi and Kuma regions all over the nation, all over the world and to our children and remotest descendants. As the governor of Kumamoto prefecture, I would like to pursue "Kumamoto's dream" together with all the residents of the prefecture.

## 6. Conclusion

I would like to close by saying that we cannot ignore flood damage, even if we do stop the construction of the dam. Instead, as Mr. Yohei Sato, a member of the Knowledge Assembly, suggested, I think we must face up to the new concept of "coexistence with floods", thus shaking ourselves free from the pre-existing idea of "flood control". For that purpose, it will

be necessary for us to focus on the wonders of urban engineering and target the “development of communities coexisting with the river,” as well as to pursue flood control measures without dams as much as possible.

In addition to hardware counter-measures, it is also necessary for us to create software solutions such as alarm systems and emergency evacuation systems, as soon as possible, for the safety of the residents in case of a flood. I think it is critical to create a community infrastructure under which everybody can live in safety and comfort, especially considering our population is aging rapidly.

It is essential that residents in the region participate in our activities voluntarily, in order to help both the physical and personal infrastructure to work effectively.

Of course, many people, including local volunteer fire fighters and people in the construction industry, lay their lives on the line for daily flood control measures, relief operations in natural disaster, and post-disaster restoration. The only people that can act according to the philosophy of protecting both residents’ lives and the Kuma river are the residents in the region.

I hope that each resident will start to think about what he or she can do as an individual in order to make his or her own community a place in which each resident can be proud of living and can live in safety and comfort.

The decision I made today may not be necessarily accepted by every person. However, at the present moment, I believe that I have made the best decision for the residents in the region.

In the U.S.A., the presidential election campaign is heating up now, but once the campaign is over, the loser shall admit and honor the winner, while the winner shall appreciate the loser’s efforts. As you can see, the essence of democracy contains confrontation. However, the beauty of democracy is being able to stand together beyond confrontation and make a step toward a higher level of society.

It is time for us to stand together beyond confrontation brought about due to the Kawabe-Gawa dam issue.

Now, come and take the first step toward Kumamoto's dream with me.