

**Building Peace in the New Year is
A Team Effort**

**By
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**For
Sanyo Shimbun
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A new year is already dawning – 2004. May you and your loved ones enjoy peace, prosperity and health in the New Year.

In the United States, newspapers and television networks traditionally look backward to review the past year's key events. Here, instead, I ask you to join me in looking forward to the new year and the unfinished work awaiting the joint effort of Americans and Japanese. Also, instead of merely examining the issues, I would like to introduce you to some of the young people who are risking their lives to make 2004 a better year for the world.

The pursuit of peace must receive priority in the new year. Despite the past year's impressive accomplishments, and the international community's well intended efforts, peace remains elusive while the possibility of war persists. The United States and Japan are close partners in the quest for peace. Their joint efforts in Iraq to restore peace and in Northeast Asia to prevent war must intensify in 2004. In Iraq, unfortunately, this requires that young Americans and Japanese must continue to risk their lives to rebuild that nation into a safe and prosperous democracy.

I know some of these young Americans and Japanese very well. One American is my youngest daughter. She was a graduate student studying motion picture production when she joined the U.S. Army Reserve to qualify for a scholarship. Last year she was called to active duty. After much training, she arrived in Iraq two weeks before Christmas. The Japanese people's concern for peace and humanitarian compassion deeply affected her while she was a student at Nishimachi Middle School in Tokyo. She volunteered to become a US Army specialist in civil affairs. Her job now is to assist frightened Iraqi civilians after US combat soldiers and Iraqi police have disrupted their lives during raids to identify and arrest insurgents in the war torn Sunni triangle of central Iraq. Eventually, when peace is restored, she hopes to help Iraqi children return to school, and to help distribute food aid and medicine.

Her goal, like so many other young Americans and Japanese her age, is to build a more peaceful future by demonstrating compassion for strangers through individual deeds, not just rhetoric.

Meanwhile, in northern Iraq near the city of Mosul, members of Peace Wind, a Japanese humanitarian organization, work quietly to distribute food, medicine and educational materials to the Kurdish people. Onishi Kensuke and his equally energetic assistant Yamamoto Rikka direct a small group of capable and devoted young Japanese volunteers as they risk their lives for little pay, while far from home and without recognition, to help strangers. They, like my daughter, hope their efforts will build a more peaceful world.

Closer to home, American and Japanese diplomats have been working intensely to prevent another Korean War, to disarm North Korea of its weapons of mass destruction, and to bring home all the abducted Japanese and their family members. These diplomats are working to make the so-called Six-Party Talks between China, Japan, the two Koreas, Russia and the United States into a diplomatic forum where peaceful solutions to the tensions on the Korean Peninsula can be forged. So far, their efforts have yet to produce any solutions. Fortunately, however, they have not given up. If these talks were to falter and fail, the risk of war in Northeast Asia would quickly become a reality.

Here my attention turns to the very capable Japanese diplomat Fujii Arata. I have known him for a decade. We worked together in the early 1990s during the first North Korean nuclear crisis to find a negotiated settlement. Until recently, Fujii-san has served as the deputy on Japan's negotiating team to the Six Party Talks and as the director of the Foreign Ministry's office of Northeast Asian Affairs. But cancer has halted his diplomatic efforts. Instead, he is in Tokyo University Hospital struggling to survive. Fortunately, Japan has many capable diplomats to continue the pursuit of peace in Northeast Asia. But my friend's assistance will be missed by all devoted to pursuing a more peaceful future.

When we think of the new year and hope for peace, let us thank the young Americans and Japanese who are working to improve prospects for peace around the world. Also, let us pray that they will return home safely.