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THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE TO TACKLE THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE

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Honorable and Respected Officials of Japan:

Please accept my deepest sympathy for suffering and loss related to Japan's earthquake, tsunami and radiation crisis. I wish the Japanese people success in renewing their infrastructure, economy and spirit.

I'm concerned, however, about animals trapped inside cities and villages in the 20km (soon to expand to 30km) radius around Fukushima Dai-ichi power plant. I've read that some 4,000 cows, 31,000 pigs, 630,000 chickens, 100 horses — along with 5,800 registered dogs and an unknown number of cats — are without care. All are tame animals who rely on humans to survive.

Moreover, they are loved animals. They are wanted animals. People did not leave them behind by choice — people had no choice. I simply ask for their humane recovery, with food and water to sustain them until rescued.

I am encouraged by a new policy to rescue exclusion-zone dogs and cats found outdoors, weak or injured, with instructions posted about where to retrieve them. While the fate of animals with high radiation levels is unclear, I thank authorities for trying to help families distraught over their animals.

Residents who vacated the nuclear exclusion zone thought they'd return quickly or tend to their animals in brief visits. The government has rightfully limited access to safeguard them. Yet with each passing day, their anxiety grows. They wonder if their pets are alive. Because so many Japanese people share this predicament, I respectfully suggest that you accept help from qualified NPOs prepared to reunite-shelter-rehome animals and follow radiation safety protocol as set forth by authorities.

I also urge you to consider pending evacuation areas such as Idate. NPOs can extend the government's capacity to keep animals with their guardians. In fact, Idate officials have already approached local animal welfare groups regarding shelter for 700 registered animals.

Interim and long term plans ought to include input from Humane Society International (HSI) and International Fund For Animal Welfare (IFAW) for a centralized no-kill shelter with decontamination/quarantine protocol, a publicized animal hotline, a searchable Internet database for lost pets, and a foster-adoption network for unclaimed animals. Experienced groups already on the ground, such as Japan Earthquake Animal Rescue And Support (JEARS), Kinship Circle Animal Disaster Response, Minashigo-tai, UKC Japan, and other Japanese NPOs can help implement these vital steps.

Helping animals helps humans. Studies show immeasurable psychological benefits for people reunited with animals in the aftermath of disasters. The Japanese government is poised to show the world it is a voice for compassion and reduced suffering, be it human or animal. To Japanese people who love a displaced dog, cat, horse...animals matter, right now.

Sincerely,