

Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize
An address by H.E. Mr. Junichiro Koizumi, former Prime Minister

Nippon Keidanren, July 4th, 2007

Good afternoon. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to speak about the Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of Nippon Keidanren, especially Mr. Okuda, former Chairman and Mr. Mitarai, present Chairman for your kind cooperation during my premiership.

Today, I came here as Chair of the 'Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize' Donation Committee to humbly ask all of you for your contribution to the Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize. And I thank Mr. Mitarai for being forthcoming in organizing this gathering.

In May last year, when I planned to visit Africa, I had the impossible task of having to choose two countries among 53 countries. Every country in Africa is favorably disposed to Japan. Every country offered their fervent invitation to me. Finally I chose Ghana and Ethiopia. The reason why I chose Ethiopia was because the African Union Headquarters is located in Addis Ababa. There, I can meet the Chairperson of the AU and also the Prime Minister of Ethiopia. Another country was Ghana. This was where Dr. Hideyo Noguchi was struck down by yellow fever at the age of 51. There was no Japanese who was invited more by research institutes in America and Europe to deliver speeches than Dr. Hideyo Noguchi in the prewar times. His achievements were formidable, for which he was even nominated for the Nobel Prize, but was not awarded, after all. Most of the Japanese know him well, what with biographies or movies about him.

I had been impressed by his achievements well before visiting Ghana. I was captivated by the biographic novels and movies depicting his life. Curiously enough, when I sank in thought in solitude in the Prime Minister's Suite of the government aircraft, I felt like being spoken to by Dr. Hideyo Noguchi saying, in person, "Glad that you came all the way to see me" under his breath, joyfully. It was then that it struck me that Japan must give a helping hand to the African people who are suffering from diseases and poverty. This was what brought me to the idea of the Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize. One says that "the dead touch the heart of the living". I really felt this had come true.

I cannot help feeling a sense of admiration for Dr. Hideyo Noguchi who, after having already enjoyed worldwide reputation, still decided to continue his research on yellow fever venturing into Africa in 1927 at the twilight age of fifty. His impassioned sense of mission and destiny is nothing less than astonishing. The very laboratory where he worked is still preserved in

Accra, Ghana.

In spite of a physical handicap, burn on his left hand suffered by accident in his early childhood, and of a lowly family background constraining the means to obtain higher education, his abilities were recognized by many people around him. And they supported him profusely enabling him to go to school, go through the operation of his hand, and to obtain a license to practice medicine. He then moved to the United States to join the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (now Rockefeller University) and won a reputation through his ground-breaking researches. He never lost passion for research to combat diseases until he was struck down by yellow fever in the harsh African terrain.

Dr. Hideyo Noguchi, as a human person, remains an object of both praise and censure. There is a biography on Noguchi, *Far Away Sun Set* written by Junichi Watanabe, who is perhaps more famous for his block-buster *Power of Insensitivity* or other romantic novelettes. I think this is truly a masterpiece of all biographic novels on Noguchi. The Hideyo Noguchi as portrayed in this novel is a personality that you will never want to associate with ever in your life (*laughter*).

I am, myself, branded as a crank (*laughter*), but he is the queerest freak I've ever come across (*laughter*). He is, in a sense, a morally bankrupt person with endless appetite to borrow and no qualms for indebtedness. As he was quite poor, he did not hesitate to borrow money whoever comes by, and then welshed nonchalantly. Curiously, there were still people who willingly lent him money despite the mounting debt. I was amazed by how callously one can borrow and bilk on a debt without a bit of compunction, but I was even flabbergasted by those who continue to lend money to such a person. Whatever his personality may have been, his achievements, otherwise, were out of this world.

The environment and Africa are the two most frequently discussed issues in recent G8-Summit meetings. These two issues can be defined as the biggest common concern of the international community today. The Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize aims to honour individuals who are fighting diseases in their respective areas, be it in medical research or in medical services. The honorarium will be all but equivalent to the Nobel Prize. It might be somewhat presumptuous if the prize amount exceeds that of the Nobel Prize, so we will award an amount of 100 million yen, just short of the Nobel Prize, every five years to individuals active in the fields of medical research and medical services. The Nobel Prize encompasses several categories such as physics, literature, and peace. The Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize, however, envisages individuals in the fields of medical research and medical services having to do with Africa, and no distinction will be made according to nationality, be it European, American, Japanese or whatever.

Japan will be host to the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) which takes place once every five years. The fourth meeting of TICAD (TICAD IV) will be held next year at Yokohama with the attendance of African presidents and prime ministers. The first award ceremony of the Prize will be held within this TICAD IV. Next year will incidentally be the 80th anniversary of Dr. Hideyo Noguchi's death. I think the occasion will present an excellent opportunity for Japan to proactively voice its commitments to the African issues.

The Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize will honour individuals for their achievements concerning medicine and health in Africa regardless of their religion, political views or age. Whether you have something to do with Africa or not, I would be thankful if you could contribute to this Prize what small amount you may feel deserving.

As I said before, Dr. Hideyo Noguchi was a paramount debtor. He shirked repayment, while repeatedly drawing a huge amount of money from generous benefactors only to be spent on food and drink eventually, instead of travel and research for which it was meant to be spent. Yet again, he borrows coolly, and lenders lend, as if under a spell (*laughter*). He was a curious eccentric, indeed.

Today, I just attended a funeral ceremony of Shoichiro Ikemiya, a writer of historical fictions and period novels. He was famous for his novels related with the *Incident of Honnoji Temple*, the *Heike family*, *Shinsaku Takasugi*, and *Revenge of the Forty-Seven Ronin*. Once during his life I had an opportunity to hold a round-table talk with him, and in this talk, I was impressed by what he said: "ordinary people should not get bogged down with a genius". What he meant by this was that unguarded ordinary people will be charmed into hell, and eventually ruined, by a genius. In the end of the samurai period, there was a business tycoon named Shiraishi who offered financial assistances to loyal supporters of the Emperor. Among those who were offered assistances, *Shinsaku Takasugi was the man who captivated Shiraishi the most. He was infatuated with Takasugi to such an extent that he all but ruined himself. However, Takasugi died just before the Meiji restoration. Later in the Meiji Period, Shiraishi was asked whether he regretted that he supported Shinsaku Takasugi which brought him to bankruptcy, and he answered: "Not a bit. If anything, it was my happiest event in my life that

* Shinsaku Takasugi (1839-1867): A central figure in the movement to overthrow the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867). Takasugi organized and led the KIHEITAI, a militia of western-style training and armament, in a coup against the conservative clique in the Choshu domain taking over its leadership and repelling a wave of shogunal punitive expeditions. Choshu's victory opened the way for united action against the shogunate and its eventual overthrow.

I encountered such a genius as Shinsaku Takasugi". This is a typical story of an ordinary person encountering a genius and losing a fortune.

Dr. Hideyo Noguchi was a genius borrower. In spite of the abject poverty he found himself in, he ventured to move to the United States and made himself a world star. Such was the genius of Noguchi that I came to console myself by now that the incumbent prime minister was asked to lend money to Noguchi (*laughter*). If I am giving to such a genius as Noguchi, there can be no greater happiness. That was why I find myself in the Chair of the Donation Committee.

At first, I thought, having served as Prime Minister for five years and five months, I would be morally obliged to donate at least 10 million or 20 million yen by allocating my retirement allowance for that period. The Mayor of Yokosuka, where I live, receives the amount of 24 million yen as a retirement allowance for one term, four years, and the Governor of Kanagawa Prefecture 40 million yen. However, my retirement allowance for five years and five months as Prime Minister is only 6.6million yen (*laughter*). After tax deduction, I finally received 6.345 million yen. I do not protest that this is too small. But I insist that the retirement allowance of mayors or governors should be cut down to the same level as that of the prime minister (*laughter*). I have already donated the whole amount of my retirement allowance to the Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize.

We call on individuals to donate one thousand yen per unit. This is because Dr. Hideyo Noguchi's portrait is printed on the one-thousand-yen bank note. I really hope that not only the government and the big businesses, but also the public at large and even elementary school pupils will donate. One thousand yen set aside for this prize from the New Year's present would be most precious. I hope that people will learn something from the life of Noguchi, and even be greatly encouraged to make efforts for a higher good, and finally these goodwill will help the African people who suffer from diseases.

I hope you will understand our aims and join in our endeavor.

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