News Release

For Immediate Release
December 27, 2023
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Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA Announces 'Recapturing Happiness: The Enduring Spirit of Ishinomaki' Photo Exhibit

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA (Sasakawa USA) and the Japan Information & Culture Center (JICC) of the Embassy of Japan will hold the photo exhibition *Recapturing Happiness: The Enduring Spirit of Ishinomaki,* featuring photographs by Mr. Keisuke Hirai. This photo exhibition conveys the resilience of the human spirit, the joy of community, and the moments of happiness that persisted in Ishinomaki following the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. The exhibition will be held from January 31 to March 13, 2024, at the Japan Information & Culture Center, and admission is free of charge.

In April 2011, Mr. Hirai traveled to Ishinomaki to begin documenting the disaster-struck area. What began as a trip to archive recovery efforts taking place in Ishinomaki turned into a photo project capturing moments of joy within the city's community despite the incomprehensible adversities that confronted them. This exhibition reminds us of the longing for happiness that shines through even in unimaginably dark times when we come together, be it as family, friends, or neighbors.

Shanti Shoji, Director of Programs at Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA says "This is very much a story about Japanese people but also a universal story that resonates with Americans, who have been increasingly suffering from natural disasters. I am thrilled to bring these remarkable stories of strength that reveal the true power of the human spirit to Washington, DC." Ms. Shoji traveled to Ishinomaki in October 2022 to meet with Mr. Hirai and the people of Ishinomaki, many of whom are captured in Mr. Hirai's photos. Ms. Shoji states that her trip and the people she met are what inspired her to bring this exhibition to Washington, DC.

"We are delighted to host this exhibit at the JICC, sharing the resilience of Ishinomaki's people with the American community," expressed Fumito Miyake, Minister for Public Affairs at the Embassy of Japan and Director of the JICC. Minister Miyake has consistently shown care for the regions affected by the earthquake and tsunami. "After the disaster, I oversaw medical delegations during the relief efforts and have made periodic visits to affected areas ever since. The smiles amidst hardship reveal the universal strength of human beings—a beautiful value. I hope younger audiences in particular embrace this exhibition and find a profound appreciation for the enduring human spirit." As Mr. Hirai said, "everyone has a right to be happy in their own ways even in times of devastating personal tragedy such as losing family members in a shocking manner."

A backdrop to this remarkable story of the enduring nature of the human spirit is the disaster relief operation and humanitarian assistance extended to local Japanese citizens in the Tohoku region by U.S. military service men and women. Operation TOMODACHI has left a lasting sense of gratitude and appreciation within Japan to the U.S. military and American people.

The exhibition will launch with an opening event celebration at the Old Ambassador's Residence on the evening of January 30th, 2024, showcasing a selection of the photos that will be on display at the JICC and featuring remarks from Mr. Hirai; Minister Koichi Ai, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Japan; Mr. Andy Anderson, Taylor Anderson Memorial Fund; and Ms. Shanti Shoji, Director of Programs, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA. The opening event will also feature a performance of J.S. Bach's Partita No. 2 "Chaconne" by world-class violinist Mr. Shun Hioki.

BIO: Mr. Keisuke Hirai

Mr. Keisuke Hirai is a freelance photographer who strives to capture the lives of people in their entirety, believing that it is the unique contradictions of humans that make seemingly imperfect human lives perfect. Mr. Hirai credits his love of photography to a friend he met while studying abroad in Canada that urged him to take photography classes. Ever since then, he has been behind the camera.

Whether it is in Cambodia, Nepal, Inner Mongolia, South Africa, or Japan, he sets out to capture photographs that illustrate the humanity we all share. Mr. Hirai is ever curious and has been involved in activities such as demining, reforestation, community revitalization, international aid, and international exchange. After traveling to Ishinomaki in April 2011 to document and promote recovery efforts, he moved there permanently and now resides in the city. Currently you can find him taking photographs of the fisheries industry in and around Ishinomaki.

Mr. Hirai has launched several photography projects in the past. Some of his most known are the *Funny!!Project*, a project based on the theme "We All Laugh Together in Different Ways," which uses photographs as a communication tool for various activities such as exhibitions, events, workshops, and talks at educational institutions around Japan. In addition, he launched the photo exhibition *10 Years of Happiness* in Ishinomaki in 2021 and published the photo book *10 年の幸福写真 ～10 YEARS AFTER 3.11 (10 Years of Happiness ～ 10 YEARS AFTER 3.11)* in 2022.

For further information, please contact Associate Communications Officer Kathryn Bubolz at kbubolz@spfusa.org.

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About Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA

Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA (Sasakawa USA) is a non-partisan 501 (c)(3) organization dedicated to deepening the understanding of and strengthening the relationship between the U.S. and Japan for the benefit of a free and open international community. Its activities focus on security and diplomacy, through exchanges, dialogue, analysis, publications, and networking. Follow us on X @SasakawaUSA, Instagram @sasakawausa, and visit our website at Sasakawa USA.