

## Background information

**About Ashinaga:** Ashinaga is a non-profit education foundation headquartered in Tokyo, Japan, that provides financial and psychological assistance in support of high school and higher education for children who have lost one or both parents, or children who have a parent with a serious disability resulting from events such as illness, accident, disaster, or war. During the 40 years of its existence in Japan, Ashinaga has provided over \$800 million in educational aid to some 80,000 students at high schools or institutions of higher education. Since 1999 Ashinaga has expanded its activities to support children in 21 countries and regions. The vast majority of the organization's funding comes from ordinary members of the community, and over 90% of donations go to support the organization's programs/services.

**About Ashinaga's activities in support of children affected by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in eastern Japan:** Ashinaga dispatched several staff members to affected areas immediately after the disaster, and on March 14 began providing emergency financial assistance and scholarships to all children who had lost parents or guardians in the tragedy, as well as single-parent households in disaster-hit areas. In order to provide the ongoing psychological support that will be required by affected children in the future, Ashinaga is developing plans to construct a "care house" in the region.

**About the name "Ashinaga":** The organization's name has its origin in the 1912 American novel by Jean Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs* ("ashinaga" in Japanese can be translated as "long legs"), about an orphaned girl whose college education is financed by an anonymous benefactor. The novel has attained great popularity in Japan since just after its publication, including the period around World War II. Ashinaga uses the name "Ashinaga-san" to refer to those anonymous donors who support the organization's efforts on behalf of children who have lost parents, or whose parents have serious disabilities; the cumulative number of Ashinaga-san stands at approximately 100,000.

**International Activities of Ashinaga:** Over the 40-plus years of its existence, Ashinaga has not only supported high school and higher education for some 80,000 children in Japan; we have also provided support for over 400 children from 31 countries/regions outside Japan. In Uganda we have a facility that provides basic education to children who have lost parents due to HIV/AIDS, and since 2006 we have brought children from other countries affected by disasters to study in Japan; this program now has 18 students—from Uganda, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Turkey – at five leading Japanese universities.

After the earthquake in 1995 in Kobe—and following similar disasters in 1999 in Taiwan, Turkey, and Colombia; in 2006 after the Sumatra-Indian Ocean earthquake/tsunami; in 2008 in Sichuan, China; and in 2010 in Haiti—Ashinaga has made a practice of collecting donations and dispatching staff to provide psychological support for children affected by disasters. These experiences have made us painfully aware of the importance of providing support for children immediately after such terrible events—how critical it is to provide them with a safe environment, enable them to feel that they are surrounded by adults who care for them, provide them with a safe place where they can talk with peers about their feelings and experiences, let them know that people around the world are concerned for them and share their anguish, and help them feel that they are by no means alone. The emotional wounds that result from a traumatic experience and the impact of support such as that mentioned above can extend to all areas of a child's present and future life.

We cannot forget one particular episode from a 2006 international camp held by Ashinaga, which featured participation by 100 children from 21 countries who had lost parents. A 20-year-old youth from Iraq, who had lost a parent due to war, and a 16-year-old from New York, who had lost a parent in the 9/11 terror attacks, participated in the camp together with children having similar backgrounds from many other countries. The two youths shared tears as they talked about the experience of losing a father due to war in Iraq and terrorism in New York, and achieved a deep mutual understanding. This impressed upon us yet again how shared sadness creates strong and profound bonds between people, and how it can become a foundation for building a new, peaceful world.

We often hear that our world today is facing an era of dramatic change and transformation. We earnestly hope that mutual compassion and the solidarity of hearts joined through shared grief and sorrow will lead to a future where we build a more peaceful and safer global community.