



Survivors: Students from the Tohoku region sing as U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos (front right) and other guests watch at the conclusion of the "BEYOND Tomorrow Global Leadership Academy 2013" forum at the Tokyo American Club on Sunday. KYODO

3/11 students vow leadership roles

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Students from the Tohoku region devastated by the March 11, 2011, disasters have vowed to draw from their experiences and take on new roles on the global stage.

"We were given opportunities to examine global issues and think about how to address them," Atsuko Arimoto, 17, said in an address at the Sunday closing ceremony of a three-day student workshop in Tokyo organized by an educational fund and a U.S. firm. Students at the workshop mapped out steps to solve water, food and energy issues.

"Now, it is our responsibility to turn the debate into action," said Arimoto, whose family was forced to evacuate their hometown of Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, to temporary housing after the tsunami spurred the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 atomic plant.

Arimoto, who spoke before an audience of almost 200 that included government officials and

business leaders as well as celebrities, including TV "tarento" Dave Spector, is now a junior at an all-girls high school in Maryland.

Arimoto was one of the 70 students from Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures — the three hardest-hit by the 3/11 disasters — who took part in the "BEYOND Tomorrow Global Leadership Academy 2013," which was organized by the Tokyo-based Global Fund for Education Assistance and funded by Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

All 70 participants visited the United States for various programs last summer under the Tomodachi Initiative, a public-private partnership that supports Japan's postdisaster recovery and aims to foster cultural and economic ties between the two nations.

U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos, who attended the event, lauded the students' resilience in overcoming the challenges.

Some of the 70 had lost family members, some their homes, and others had been forced to live in temporary shelters.

"So many young faces have been through so much over the past two years," Roos said, urging them to "keep up the good work" in their quest to become future leaders.

On Sunday, the pupils gave three-minute group presentations on the role of student associations in solving global issues. They also presented their ideas on solving food, water and energy problems using the perspective gained from overcoming the 2011 disasters.

Among the volunteers was James Seddon, assistant vice president of marketing and corporate affairs of Merrill Lynch Japan Securities Co., who took part in the same group discussions with Arimoto.

"I feel really hopeful for Japan to know that there is this kind of generation that — even though they have gone through this terrible experience — they are looking towards the future, they have very clear goals and a lot of confidence with which to pursue them," Seddon said.