On Thursday, October 20, 2016, the East Asia Institute (EAI) hosted Tetsuro Amano, Consul General of Japan in Houston, to present a lecture entitled "U.S.-Japan Relations: Present and Future What Lies Ahead for Japan and the U.S.?" This event was free and open to the public. Students and faculty from many different disciplines of study attended to hear what the Consul General had to say about Japan's economy revival, security, and its ties with the U.S.

Consul General Amano graduated from the University of Tokyo with a Bachelor’s Degree. Soon after, he entered the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications and went on to his first Consul General role at the Consulate-General of Japan in Hong Kong.

In the span of 15 years, Amano has held office in various countries, including Norway, Iraq, Myanmar, Australia, and the Philippines. He also has served as the Director of Japanese Nationals Overseas Safety Division in the Consular Affairs Bureau.

Prior to the lecture, a private reception was held in honor of Amano. UTSA president Dr. Ricardo Romo, City Councilman Ron Nirenberg, faculty of UTSA from serveral departments, San Japan representatives, and members of Japan America Society of San Antonio were in attendance to welcome Amano to UTSA. During the reception Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Director of the East Asia Institute, gave a brief introduction to the distinguished guests of honor before passing the floor to Dr. Romo. Romo spoke off his script about Japan’s major innovations and inspiring feats in art and technology over the ages before formally introducing Amano who spoke about the great partnership between Japan and the United States in many capacities. “While I have been to San Antonio eight or nine times, I feel coming to speak at UTSA is one of the most important visits I have made.” said Amano. Romo and Amano finished their speeches by exchanging a gift with each other.

Councilman Nirenberg also gave a few thanks and acknowledged fundraising done by the Japanese America Society of San Antonio’s Fall Festival for earthquake relief given to San Antonio’s sister city of Kumamoto.

Concluding the reception, several executive members of the San Japan Convention led by Dave Henkin, graciously donating a check in the amount of $2,175 to the East Asia Institute to encourage UTSA
students to study abroad in Japan. For a decade San Japan has celebrated Japanese animation, Asian pop culture and fandom communities. During this time San Japan has participated in a number of community events and joined in with dozens of other organizations to bring relief to Kumamoto.

After the reception, Amano moved into the lecture hall to begin his presentation. He broke down his lecture into three parts; Japan's current economy and the progress of "Abenomics", Japan's evolving security policies, and the current and future plans for Japan-United States cooperation.

He began by illustrating Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" plan with the Japanese proverb "a single arrow can be easily broken, but not three in a bundle". According to Amano, "The arrows in this quote connect with the three arrows within Abe's 'Abenomics' plan; monetary policy, fiscal policy and growth strategy & structural reform." A prime cause for Japan's ailing economy is due to weak domestic demand and investment. With interest rates hovering between 0% and negative values, Japanese citizens often elect to keep money in their houses over risking it at a bank.

Under Abe's first arrow, the Japanese government hopes to enact monetary policy to bring inflation rates up which will encourage citizens to spend money and make cheaper Japanese exports more appealing to foreign countries. The second arrow involves raising the consumption tax on goods and services in order to finance the growing debt, welfare for the aging Japanese population, and pay for public works projects, many of which are linked to the 2020 Olympics. While stimulating economics growth through government spending, the Japanese government hopes to rebuild their finances. Finally, the third arrow seeks to accomplish spur growth through a wide number of policies including making the workforce more accommodating for women, lowering corporate taxes, deregulation & lowering of trade barriers and improving the ease of tourism.

Overall since the start of "Abenomics" in 2012, Japanese real GDP has risen 2.7% and real GNI has grown 5.4%. Since the lowest point in the Japanese economy in 2009, unemployment rates have been dropping, college graduates are finding jobs easier and the average minimum wages has been climbing with a target of 1,000 yen.

Amano also briefly spoke about the importance to the Japanese economy that the Trans-Pacific Partnership will hold if agreed upon. "Lowered tariffs would stimulate trade with Japan's neighboring countries in the pacific..."
creating an environment of free and transparent trade,” said Amano.

Amano then went on to explain a number of security concerns that Japan is dealing with currently. Amano has seen first hand Kim-Jong Un's strong military ambitions after visiting Pyongyang twice. “North Korea's recent missile testing has been of great concern for Japan due to their close proximity, even mentioning North Korea's failed missile test that had taken place just over the weekend,” stated Amano.

Japan has also placed a number of sanctions on North Korea due to their abduction of a number of Japanese citizens, many of which have yet to be returned. Amano claimed “another rising issue is China's strengthening of military forces and unilateral attempts to change the status quo.” Activities in the East China Sea and the Senkaku Islands intrude into Japan’s territorial waters and within the South China Sea China rejects arbitral tribunal judgements under UNCLOS. During his time in the Philippines, Amano cites a growing tension between China and other South East Asian countries.

Amano noted that while no country is able to secure its own peace by itself, the international community expects Japan to play a more proactive role for peace and stability within the world as a whole. Just as Japan relies on the United States on other allies for protection, they should be able to rely on Japan in turn. In order to achieve this, Japan has a need to develop domestic legislation that enables seamless responses. There is no change in Japan’s posture and orientation for the past 70 years as a peace-loving nation, legislation will instead enhance the deterrence of the Japan-U.S. Alliance for the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

Lastly, Amano discussed Japan's growing investment and cultural exchange with the United States. “Currently, Japan has 3,000 companies around the United States, $580 billion in output, and created 1.7 million jobs,” said Amano. In relation to Texas, it has the second highest employment by Japanese-owned firms/affiliates with 71,526 people employed. Japanese firms are also the second international employers in Texas. Japan is the highest international investor in Texas, 9th largest export destination for Texas good, and Japanese tourists spend about 1.5 billion dollars in Texas a year. Year over year, the number of tourists people visiting Japan is increasing with just under 20 million people visiting in 2015. The Japanese government has set lofty goals hoping to break 40 million visitors by 2020 and 60 million by 2030. With 432 sister city pairs, currently over 19,000 Japanese students study in the United States and about 6,000 American students study abroad in Japan.

The lecture concluded and Consul General received several questions during the Q & A session, including the current relations between Japan and Russia in terms of a peace treaty, Japan being under the nuclear umbrella provided by the U.S-Japan alliance and as the number of elderly people in Japan continues to increase, how will the Japanese government address it.

Amano’s lecture was profoundly timely considering the current United States election, rising tensions in the Asian sphere and Japan-U.S. economic connections.

The UTSA East Asia institute’s mission is to promote appreciation and understanding of East Asian societies and cultures both on campus and in the community through research, outreach, networking, education, student/faculty exchange and business development and cooperation.