



Tadashi Yamamoto

Founder of the Japan Center for International Exchange and supporter of global health initiatives. Born in March, 1936, in Tokyo, Japan, he died of gallbladder cancer on April 15, 2012, in Tokyo, aged 76 years.

Soon after the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was founded in 2002, its director of external relations and partnerships, Christoph Benn, was looking for ways to engage Japan in the fledgling global health funding body. A member of the Fund's Board gave Benn a piece of advice: "He said to me, 'there's a person who can really help you, but he's never been introduced to global health,'" recalls Benn. The name of that person was Tadashi Yamamoto.

Although he never served in a formal governmental role, Yamamoto had been remarkably influential in the sphere of international exchange between Japan and the wider world since the 1960s. Founder of the independent Japan Center for International Exchange in 1970, he had been involved in countless forms of exchange and dialogue, such as the US-Japan Parliamentary Exchange Program. "I know of no more important individual in Japan or the United States who is so effective in strengthening our bilateral ties", Thomas S Foley, former US Ambassador to Japan, said in 2011 when Yamamoto was awarded the highest award for a citizen of Japan: the Order of the Rising Sun Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon.

When Benn eventually met Yamamoto, in 2003, he recalls how "He saw the image of Japan as a soft power, and global health fitted into that kind of thinking. And he had

the kind of close relationships with the present and past Prime Ministers of Japan that allowed him to ask them to be champions for the Global Fund. He could say to them that this was a perfect way to demonstrate Japan's concern for the rest of the world." Since then, Japan has always been a generous donor to the Fund. "None of that would have happened without Tadashi Yamamoto", says Benn. Yamamoto was also the founder of the Friends of the Global Fund, Japan, a private support group that works to harness the support for the battle against communicable diseases. It was the first such organisation to form, and has since been emulated in several other regions.

Lincoln Chen, President of the US-based China Medical Board, notes that Yamamoto's impact on global health extended far beyond his relationship with the Global Fund. He was an early promoter of the 2001-02 Commission on Human Security co-chaired by economist Amartya Sen and diplomat Sadako Ogata that had health security as a primary theme, and most importantly was a promoter and sponsor of Japanese non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in global health. "From large to small, from targeted to general, from Japan to international, the NGOs nurtured by Tadashi have and are contributing mightily to a more peaceful, equitable, and healthy world", Chen said.

Yamamoto's earliest ambition had been to enter the Catholic priesthood. After graduating from Jesuit-run schools, he attended Jochi (Sophia) University where he studied philosophy, and then took a life-changing decision to study abroad, attending St Norbert College, a Catholic University in Wisconsin, USA. Living in the USA at the time when John F Kennedy was running for President and Martin Luther King Jr was leading the civil rights movement was an inspirational experience and when he returned to Japan in 1962, Yamamoto involved himself in overseas exchange under Tokusaburo Kosaka, president of Shin-Etsu Chemical company. His life's course was set.

"He was a liberal internationalist, an optimist who believed wholeheartedly that cultural exchanges and dialogue could bring peoples and nations closer together, especially those that previously had been adversaries", Barnett Baron, president and CEO of Give2Asia, wrote recently. Remembered by those who knew him as warm, gentle, and passionate, Yamamoto had a natural gift for communication. "Tadashi Yamamoto was a treasure not only for Japan but for the global community because of his self-effacing modality of work to bring Japanese and others together around common themes of our shared humanity. He had a deep commitment to civil participation for peaceful development and recognised the power and responsibility of Japan to contribute globally", Chen told *The Lancet*. Yamamoto's wife Chiyoko died in 2007. He is survived by four sons and eight grandsons.

Stephen Pincock