

【What's to be done with Ikeda Zoo?】

Hello, I'm Mr. Omori, Mayor of Okayama.

Two days ago, the executives of Ikeda Zoo visited the Okayama city hall and submitted the request to municipalize the zoo.

Ikeda Zoo is one of the few private zoos in Japan and its head zookeeper is the Emperor's elder sister, Mrs. Atsuko Ikeda. Since the opening of Ikeda Sangyo Zoo (the predecessor of Ikeda Zoo) in 1953, it has been familiar as the place where citizens can relax and learn the importance of life for emotional development.

Despite of its long tradition and history, the number of visitors has declined to under 60 percent of that of its peak days. They have been confronting an extremely severe business environment with the cumulative deficit of about 249 million yen.

The request made under such a situation was the one to ask for our understanding on their severe state and thus ask for the municipalization of the zoo. I answered the following at the present stage.

- (1) What is to be pursued by municipalization? If it is to make up for the deficit from the past years, I am not very sure if we proceed. (They replied that is not the purpose.)
- (2) The city doesn't have any know-how on running a zoo. I want them to discuss further to refine their ideal model of the zoo involving business people and professionals. On that occasion, we should be ready to participate in if invited.

I fully understand that Ikeda Zoo has contributed a lot as the place for emotional development. At the current stage, nothing is decided regarding the future vision of the zoo, which is the most important part of the planning. As Ikeda Zoo will direct discussions going forward, I would like to seek possible support as the city learning from the citizens and the city council members.