

Speech by Mr. Kentaro SONOURA
Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan
At the Croatia Forum 2015

[Opening Remarks]

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor and privilege to be invited to address you here at the Croatia Forum today. I would like to express my deepest respect to the Croatian Government for its leadership in hosting this important conference for many years.

[History and Characteristics of Japan's ODA]

The main theme of this year's forum is development cooperation. Seventy years have passed since the end of the Second World War, and during this period, Japan has changed from a country receiving assistance, to a country providing assistance, and as a result, Japan has experienced an extensive range of events. In providing Official Development Assistance, or ODA, Japan follows three principles based on such experience.

The first principle is to support ODA recipients' self-help efforts.

From our experience, we know that developing countries' sense of ownership is the key to successful ODA. We have supported countries in cultivating their abilities to pave the way toward self-sustainable growth.

Human resource development is the foundation of this policy. To date, we have sent more than 120,000 experts to host countries around the world, and Japan has accepted over half a million trainees.

The second principle is to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Poverty eradication is impossible without economic growth. We provide ODA help countries construct their socio-economic infrastructure including bridges, roads, ports and harbors, with a view to attracting investment from the private sector. We aim to generate employment and sustainable growth, and ultimately help to eradicate poverty in those countries. We are confident that this assistance approach has greatly contributed to the dramatic development of Asian countries.

The third principle is to place emphasis on human security.

Assistance according to this principle focuses on protecting people in hardships due to fear and want, due to various threats such as conflicts, infectious diseases, or disasters, and by assisting them we help strengthen their capabilities to improve quality of life.

I imagine some of you will attend the ceremony in Srebrenica tomorrow. There, Japanese agricultural experts are working to provide technical assistance in agriculture and stock farming. They help families that have returned from refuge, as well as single parent families, to achieve economic independence, and those experts also aspire to support ethnic reconciliation. This is assistance from the viewpoint of human security.

[Japan's Support for the Southeast European Countries]

According to these assistance principles, Japan has provided bilateral ODA totaling about 2.2 billion US dollars to Southeast Europe. Through this, Japan has implemented "seamless assistance" covering the construction of refugee camps during the conflict period, to the reconstruction of bridges and school buildings after the end of the conflict, as well as the development of human resources necessary for the nation-building process.

Croatia, the host country of this forum, has achieved democratization and the introduction of a market economy, and thus has become an EU member. And now, this country is assisting others, by holding this kind of conference and making an intellectual contribution in the domain of global development assistance. I sincerely respect and admire the endeavors and achievements Croatia has made.

I believe that the bilateral partnerships between Japan and the Southeast European countries should be led by investment from the private sectors of both countries in the future. The project of thermal power plant Plomin C in Croatia, is a good example of this approach. At the same time, Japan will continue to provide support through ODA to cope with issues that remain unsolved in this region, such as establishing political stability and taking measures to solve environmental problems.

[ODA in the Future]

Lastly, I would like to present my view on the topics discussed in the morning sessions.

With regard to security and development, I would stress the importance of assistance to fragile states. If we do nothing to help fragile states such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Somalia, and South Sudan, terrorist groups based in these states will threaten the peace and prosperity of the adjacent growing regions, and eventually, threaten the entire world. This is clear from what is recently going on around us. In order to secure the peace and stability of the international community, we must enhance support for these fragile states.

The next topic is the diversity of donors. Along with the rise of emerging countries as new donors, the useful contribution by NGOs through their original approaches, and the progress in south-south cooperation, donors are sometimes put in the position of being chosen by recipients. In such a situation, there is a call for donors to devise high-quality, and competitive—which also means cost-effective assistance projects, and in this respect, they should encourage and vie with each other, under the spirit of "cooperation and competition."

Japan, determined to meet such a demand, integrated the assistance organizations that had existed into JICA, and reformed JICA as a comprehensive assistance organization, performing all ODA functions, namely, ODA loans, grant aid, and technical assistance. This type of organization is rarely seen elsewhere in the world.

Furthermore, Japan revised its ODA Charter for the first time in 12 years and established the Development Cooperation Charter in February this year.

In this new charter, we aspire to achieve "quality growth," which means that the fruits of growth will be shared across society, including the low and middle-income classes, rather than slavishly pursuing only growth. In addition, we will further enhance assistance to establish the rule of law, and achieve good governance, the consolidation of democracy, and the improvement of women's rights.

In the field of infrastructure development assistance, which I would say is Japan's forte, we have been making constant efforts for improvement in light of the times and the situations in the recipient countries. For example, in constructing a subway in New Delhi, India, with ODA loans from Japan, women-only cars and an emergency call system were introduced, and barrier-free facilities were installed, which make the subway convenient for women and easily accessible for people with disabilities. We will continue to provide high quality infrastructure that is durable, easy to use, environmentally friendly, and cost-effective.

[Closing Remarks]

In this age when the world is experiencing great changes, ODA has a new role to play as investment for the future. In accordance with the tradition of the 60-year-old Japanese assistance model, we will actively contribute to the discussions on development issues in the international community, seeking to find a form of ODA that is capable of fulfilling the functions to meet the needs of the times. Together we can achieve peace, prosperity and a better quality of life for more and more people.

Thank you for your kind attention.

End