

Opening Remark by H.E. Masahiko SHIBAYAMA,  
Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Roundtable hosted by UNITAR Hiroshima Office  
“Afghanistan Reconstruction – Challenges and Commitments”

Your Excellency Haron Amin, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to Japan,  
Honorable members of UNITAR Hiroshima Office,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, thank you for your kind comment on Mr. Kazuya Ito, a promising young man who struggled for peace of Afghanistan. I would like to congratulate the opening of this roundtable to wrap-up the UNITAR Hiroshima Fellowship for Afghanistan organized by UNITAR Hiroshima Office.

Since its launch in 2003, this program has provided training to lots of people such as government officials, academics and practitioners, who will lead the efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. May I express my deep respect to UNITAR, to everyone who worked hard, and to Hiroshima Prefecture for its support to this program. I would also like to congratulate participants of this year for having completed the program.

Nearly seven years ago, Japan took the initiative in supporting the reconstruction efforts of the people of Afghanistan. We hosted the International Conference on the

Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan in Tokyo in February 2002, which marked the beginning of the reconstruction process of Afghanistan. Efforts by the Government and people of Afghanistan, supported by the whole international community, have made remarkable progress both in political process and reconstruction. Japan's assistance in various fields adds up to 1.45 billion US dollars. In addition to the assistance, we are providing, and will continue providing, replenishment support to the maritime interdiction operations in the Indian Ocean to share the responsibility of the international community in the fight against terrorism.

Meanwhile, our fight against terrorism has come to a crucial stage as the instability of the security situation in Afghanistan has been increasing. The assistance to Afghanistan will not reduce its importance in the near future, as we will discuss today. Japan will also implement the assistance of 550 million US dollars pledged at the Paris Conference in June.

The International Community shares the view that Afghanistan needs continued assistance. At the same time, however, I have to mention that the nation-building of Afghanistan will never succeed without firm ownership of the Afghan people. Security and anti-terrorism measures as well as reconstruction assistance are provided to lay the foundation on which the Afghans themselves will maintain security and run

their own country. In this sense, this fellowship program takes a right approach by training Afghans to take on these tasks.

Let me also point out that Japan has been stressing the importance of human resources development, while providing assistance in various other fields. More than 500 schools have been constructed or restored with Japanese assistance, giving many pupils a chance to study. JICA's technical assistance has sent more than 180 Japanese experts to Afghanistan and received more than 100 Afghan trainees in the education field. As long as the people of Afghanistan aspire to reconstruct its country and continue their efforts, the Government and the people of Japan will be more than pleased to continue providing as much assistance as possible.

At this very moment, the Diet of Japan is discussing at the Diet whether or not we continue the replenishment support activities in the Indian Ocean and how our assistance to Afghanistan should be. All countries need the support of their respective people to continue assistance to Afghanistan. I would like to close my remarks by expressing my sincere hope that today's discussions at the Roundtable will not only deepen each other participant's but also the Japanese people's understanding of importance of assisting Afghanistan, which in turn will encourage its nation-building effort.

Thank you.