

Joint Statement on Establishing Strategic Partnership between Japan and the Lao PDR

His Excellency Mr. Thongsing Thammavong, Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) paid an Official Working Visit to Japan from 4 to 7 March 2015, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Lao PDR. During his visit, Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong was received in audience by His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, held a meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and met with other distinguished figures including political and business leaders. At the meeting between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong held on 6 March 2015, both sides exchanged views on a wide range of issues with regard to bilateral relations and cooperation as well as regional and international issues of common interest, and issued the following joint statement with the annex of areas for cooperation.

Overview

1. Both sides highlighted the longstanding friendship between the two countries for 60 years, and appreciated especially the recent 5 years' development of bilateral relations since they decided to promote "Comprehensive Partnership" toward Enduring Friendship and Regional Prosperity in 2010. On that basis, they decided to upgrade the bilateral relationship to "Strategic Partnership" based on mutual respect, trust and understanding to develop mutually beneficial partnership further, thus contributing to the promotion of global peace and prosperity.

Political and Security Area

2. Both sides appreciated the long-standing contribution of the two countries to peace and prosperity in the region and beyond. Prime Minister Thongsing praised Japan's enduring efforts and positive contributions to the international society as a peace-loving nation for 70 years since the end of World War II and expressed the Lao PDR's support for Japan's more active role in ensuring peace, stability and prosperity of the region and the international community under the policy of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" based on the principle of international cooperation. Prime Minister Abe emphasized the important role played by the Lao PDR within ASEAN, thus contributing to peace and prosperity in the region. They affirmed further collaboration to strengthen policy dialogues between the two countries for peace and prosperity of the region and the international community. They shared the view that the two countries will work together in order to realize sustainable peace and prosperity while promoting universal values including freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights.

Economic Cooperation

3. Both sides affirmed to strengthen their economic cooperation in both bilateral and regional cooperation frameworks. Prime Minister Abe expressed his intention to strengthen cooperation for not only poverty reduction and infrastructure development but also for industrial development of the Lao PDR from the standpoint that a sustainable development of the Lao PDR is essential for the interests of the two countries as well as stability and prosperity of the entire region. Prime Minister Thongsing highly appreciated Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) and expressed expectations for continuous support by Japan and strongly supported Japan's efforts to promote "the development of Quality Infrastructure for Quality Growth" through people-centered investment, as an effective approach to close the global infrastructure gap, which is a major bottleneck for global growth. They celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first dispatch of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) to the Lao PDR, which was the first recipient country of JOCV, and reaffirmed the JOCV's important role in the development of society of the Lao PDR.

Trade and Investment

4. Both sides appreciated that economic ties in the field of trade and investment between the two countries have rapidly become closer in recent years. They shared the view to work closely for further promotion of trade and investment between the two countries. They will strengthen their mutually beneficial partnership, making the utmost use of potentialities of their partnership, in anticipation of building the ASEAN Community by the end of 2015.

People-to-People and Cultural Exchange

5. Both sides shared the recognition that bilateral people-to-people and cultural exchange in all areas and at all levels contribute to promoting mutual trust and understanding between the people of the two countries. They welcomed the active people-to-people and cultural exchange in recent years including at local level and shared the view to strengthen them including the field of tourism for the further promotion of mutual trust and understanding, taking opportunity of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. They expressed strong expectation that direct flights between the two countries will be realized as soon as possible through conclusion of the bilateral air services agreement and that mutual friendship will be further strengthened by the joint commemorative projects on *sakura* (Japanese cherry trees) and Lao elephants.

Cooperation on Regional and International Issues

6. Both sides highly appreciated collaboration between the two countries so far in the international arena. They affirmed that they will contribute more actively for regional and global peace and prosperity through utilizing policy dialogues and enhancing collaboration between the two countries.

Signed in Tokyo, Japan, on 6 March 2015,

SHINZO ABE
Prime Minister of Japan

THONGSING THAMMAVONG
Prime Minister of the Lao PDR

Areas for Cooperation under Strategic Partnership
between Japan and the Lao PDR
(Annex of the Joint Statement)

1 Political and Security Area

(1) Political/Security Dialogues

Both sides appreciated the success of Political Consultative Meeting between the two foreign ministries at the director-general level and the first Japan-Laos Security Dialogue in 2014. They affirmed their readiness to hold the next meetings on a mutually convenient occasion in 2015.

(2) Non-Proliferation/Disarmament

Both sides shared the intention to strengthen cooperation in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament. In this regard, they affirmed the importance of a successful outcome of 2015 NPT Review Conference.

(3) Security/Defense Cooperation

Both sides shared the view to promote possible security and defense cooperation in various areas, such as the Experts' Working Group (EWG) on Humanitarian Assistance / Disaster Relief (HA/DR) of ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) where the two countries closely cooperate as the co-chairing countries, acceptance of Lao students in National Defense Academy of Japan and cooperation for disaster risk reduction and human resource development.

2 Economic Cooperation

(1) Overview

Prime Minister Abe expressed that Japan will maintain and strengthen its cooperation in the field of infrastructure development, agriculture, education, medical and healthcare and the clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the Lao PDR. Prime Minister Thongsing highly appreciated Japan's support and reaffirmed the Lao PDR's efforts to achieve goals including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and graduation from the status of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

(2) Enhancing Connectivity in the Region

Both sides shared the view to cooperate with each other, in the context of building ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), in various fields including improvement of connectivity in the region, development of infrastructure, both in soft and hard aspects, through the framework of Japan-Mekong cooperation.

(3) Sustainable Development of the Lao Economy

Both sides affirmed the recognition that development of manufacturing and processing industries which add value to natural resources and raw materials is important to secure sustainable development of the Lao economy. From this standpoint, Prime Minister Abe expressed his support to the industrial development of the Lao PDR.

3 Trade and Investment

(1) Overview

Both sides shared the view to elevate momentum for promotion of trade and investment between the two countries by making maximum use of existing frameworks including Japan-Mekong cooperation, and through the development of “Mekong Industrial Development Vision”.

(2) Promotion of Investments

Both sides shared the intention to promote investments by Japanese enterprises to the Lao PDR through holding investment seminars and other efforts in response to increasing interest of Japanese enterprises towards the Lao PDR. In this regard, both sides affirmed to strengthen their efforts for maintaining and improving investment environment in the Lao PDR by utilizing and strengthening the Japan-Lao Public and Private Sectors Joint Dialogue.

(3) Development of Local Industry and Products

Both sides shared the view to cooperate in the field of the development of local industries, promotion of export of local products as well as the capacity-building of Lao entrepreneurs with particular emphasis on the youth and women.

(4) Energy Cooperation

Both sides affirmed the importance of promoting clean and renewable power generation including hydro-power generation as a pragmatic measure in addressing climate change. In this regard, highly efficient coal-fired power generation is also considered as a possible option in future cooperation. They welcomed the commencement of the construction works of Nam Ngiep 1 hydro power project that both Japanese enterprise and Lao entity are jointly developing in an environmentally-friendly manner.

(5) RCEP

Both sides affirmed the commitment of the two countries to actively engaging in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations and to cooperating further towards achieving the goal of concluding the RCEP negotiations by the end of 2015.

4 People-to-People and Cultural Exchange

(1) Air Services Agreement

Both sides welcomed the signing of the “Agreement between Japan and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic for Air Services” in January 2015 and shared the view to cooperate in establishing direct flights between the two countries. In this regard, they shared the view to cooperate in promoting tourism exchange between the two countries.

(2) Visa Exemption

Prime Minister Thongsing welcomed the implementation of visa exemption for official passport holders of the Lao PDR by the government of Japan which is scheduled to start from April 2015.

(3) People-to-People Exchange

Prime Minister Thongsing highly appreciated Japan’s cooperation in people-to-people exchange of approximately 1500 people from 2013 to 2017, such as Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths (JENESYS) 2.0 implemented under Prime Minister Abe’s initiative.

(4) Student Exchange

Prime Minister Thongsing highly appreciated Japan’s intention to double the number of international students including those from the Lao PDR studying in Japan by 2020 on the year 2012 basis.

(5) Scientific and Technological Exchange

Both sides welcomed the successful start of the “Japan-Asia Youth Exchange Program in Science” and concurred to further promote exchange programs in the field of science and technology.

(6) WA Project

Prime Minister Thongsing expressed his expectation on “WA Project ~Toward Interactive Asia through ‘Fusion and Harmony’~” to promote two-way arts and cultural exchange and Japanese language learning assistance.

(7) Japanese Language Learning Assistance

Both sides shared the view to promote cooperation in the field of Japanese language learning assistance. To this end, Prime Minister Abe expressed that Japan will make efforts to dispatch Japanese-language education assistants to the Lao PDR.

(8) Sports Exchange

Both sides shared the intention to promote sports exchange between the two countries, such as Judo and football, through the initiatives such as the “Sport for Tomorrow” programme.

(9) Empowerment of Women

Both sides shared the intention to strengthen their cooperation for empowerment of women including “A Society where Women Shine” initiative by Prime Minister Abe.

(10) Symbolical Exchange

Both sides highly appreciated that approximately 300 Japanese cherry trees were planted in Houaphanh Province of the Lao PDR, and four Asian elephants were given as a gift from the Lao PDR to the Kyoto City Zoo of Japan.

(11) Local Partnership Cooperation

Both sides highly appreciated the recent development of exchange at the local government level between the two countries.

5 Cooperation on Regional and International Issues

(1) ASEAN/EAS

Both sides affirmed that the two countries will closely cooperate with each other on regional issues such as building of the ASEAN Community and strengthening the EAS. Japan expressed its support for the success of the Lao PDR’s ASEAN Chairmanship in 2016.

(2) Counter-terrorism/Transnational Crime

Both sides shared the view to strengthen collaboration between the two countries in the area of non-traditional security such as counter-terrorism and transnational crimes. In this regard, they expressed their resolute condemnation of all acts of inhumanity, violence, brutality, and terror in all its forms and manifestation, including the murder of Japanese and other hostages. They shared the recognition that the two countries will never give in to terrorism, and will actively contribute to the peace and stability of the world together with the international community in an unwavering manner. In this regard, Prime Minister Thongsing applauded the role played by Japan in working towards promoting peace and stability in the Middle East, including its non-military/humanitarian assistance to the region.

(3) Maritime Order

Both sides underscored the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight of the high seas, unimpeded lawful commerce, as well as resolving disputes by peaceful means, exercising self-restraint and without resorting to the threat or use of force, in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in order to maintain peace and stability in the region and the world. They affirmed the importance of an effective norm which contributes to ensure freedom and safety of sea navigation.

(4) Korean Peninsula

Both sides shared the view that maintenance of peace, security and stability in the Korean Peninsula is of great importance. They called for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and reaffirmed the importance of fully implementing the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the 2005 Six-Party talks Joint Statement. They also underlined the importance of addressing the issues of humanitarian concerns of the international community, including the abductions issue.

(5) Reform of the United Nations

Both sides reaffirmed that urgent reform of the UN is needed, including the Security Council which would include expansion of both permanent and non-permanent categories in order to make the body more representative, efficient, transparent and responsive to the current realities of the world situation. They shared the view to enhance cooperation achieving concrete outcomes of Security Council reform, in view of the 70th anniversary of the UN. Prime Minister Abe appreciated the Lao PDR's support for Japan to become a permanent member of the Security Council.

(6) Whaling

Prime Minister Abe appreciated the Lao PDR's support for Japan on the whaling issue, including cooperation at the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

(7) UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction/Mekong-Japan Summit

Prime Minister Abe welcomed that Deputy Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Asang Laoly will participate in the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai in March and Prime Minister Thongsing will participate in the Seventh Mekong-Japan Summit in Tokyo in July this year. Through these occasions, both sides affirmed to enhance the bilateral cooperation in addressing regional and global issues.