

International Conference on the victims of ethnic and religious
violence in the Middle East

Speech by Kentaro Sonoura, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs

September 8th, 2015

Honorable Mr. Paolo Gentiloni, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First, I wish to express my sincere admiration and appreciation for convening this important conference.

In the Middle East, the diversity of societies is threatened by the expansion of violent extremism. I am fully aware of the crisis that religious and ethnic minority groups in the region are facing.

We should never allow any self-righteous ideologies that violently exclude others due to religious, sectarian, or ethnic differences. The international society must assemble its wisdom, and resolutely confront violent extremism, and Japan is ready to play a positive role in such efforts.

Raging violent extremism is producing vast number of refugees and displaced persons, and is deteriorating the humanitarian situation on a

daily basis. It is clearly necessary to continue humanitarian aids for urgent needs; however, what is most important for the future, is to bring back stability, and to enable people, including minority groups, to live peacefully within the ethnic and religious diversity of the Middle East.

Our philosophy for assistance to the Middle East is, “Khair Al-Umuri Ausatoha” / “The Best Way is to Go in the Middle”. Japan has provided diverse support through utilizing our strengths, such as nation-building, human resource development, and encouragement of national reconciliation, in order to stabilize the people’s livelihood, to foster the middle class, and to create a society where extremism is difficult to take root.

In order to embody these ideas, Japan has extended financial assistance of about 127 million US dollars for Iraq since February last year, including emergency grant aid of 10 million US dollars in July this year. In addition, Japan’s assistance amounts to about 1.135 billion US dollars,

in total, since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. Japan has implemented humanitarian assistance in the Middle East in a wide variety of fields such as countering youth unemployment, reducing social gaps, and providing education.

Japan has deep experience in supporting these areas and has been actively contributing through international organizations for activities such as:

- Support for building temporary dwellings in Iraq and Syria
- Providing an educational environment for children of internally displaced people in Iraq
- Support for developing human resources for the protection of cultural properties in Iraq
- Support for training and information campaigns for gender equality and women

I believe this conference will be a significant turning point towards efforts to bring back “stability” and “the middle way” in the Middle East.

Thank you.