

Speech by Foreign Minister Kono
at the first-ever Japan-Arab Political dialogue
September 11, 2017

1. Introduction

- Chairman, Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Assalam alaikum jameean.

- It is with my greatest pleasure to welcome the first-ever Japan-Arab Political dialogue. I am truly honored to make my remark at the historic headquarters of the League of Arab States here today.

- About a month ago, when I took office as the Foreign Minister, I held my first press conference. In the remark I gave there, I gave a strong commitment to the Middle East as one of the five pillars of my foreign policy. Then immediately, I decided to bring myself here, so that I can clearly show Japan's will to play a greater role in peace and prosperity in the Middle East.

- My engagement with this region dates back long before I assumed the current post. As a member of the Parliament, I visited the Middle East almost every year. I had discussions with my friends in the region how Japan and the Middle East can become closer, and how Japan can do more to contribute to peace and prosperity in this region.

- Sometimes, I have also extended my visit to the refugee camps in Bethlehem and Zaatari. The direct encounters with the reality of refugees have made me deeply believe that Japan needs to make more efforts in the Middle East. On these occasions, I was happy to hear appreciation from many of my friends for Japan's Official Development Assistance. But at the same time, questions were often

raised -- ‘How come Japan doesn’t have more political presence in the Middle East?’, ‘What does it mean after all if the aid doesn’t really help to promote the actual business exchanges with Japan?’.

- I cherish these experiences, and invaluable advice I received from many of my friends in the Middle East. And, now as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, I declare that the Middle East will sit in the core of my foreign policy, and that I will foster my commitment to peace and stability in the region. Today I will share with you my fundamental concept and new initiatives.

2. The Middle East: Foundation of peace and prosperity for Japan

- The Middle East is an important part of the foundation for economy and prosperity of Japan. It is a major provider of the energy resources that power Japan’s economy. The sea-lane running through the region is especially critical for the flow of goods to Japan. Furthermore, peace and stability in this region is important for Japan not just in economic and social terms, but it is also directly linked to our national security.
- Japan has built a positive track record in the Middle East with years of down-to-earth engagement. I am so proud that Japan has gained reputation as a good friend of the region, who has contributed to its socio-economic development for many years. Japan is in fact blessed with a unique position; we have built good relationship with people across the region, regardless of their religion, whether it is Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. On top of that, Japan is also able to hold candid talks with the United States, another major player in the region. We will play an even more active role towards peace and stability in the region by fully capitalizing such unique position.

- With more than 500 million people and the GDP of about 4 trillion dollars, the Middle East is a very attractive frontier for Japanese businesses. But, the scope of our partnership should not stop at the economic sphere. The Middle East is a partner for Japan in implementing our “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy”, which links the growing Asia-Pacific and the Middle East and Africa.
- In addition, I would like to stress that it is the religious tolerance and sympathy to Islam that characterizes the nature of Japan. We share with Islam the spirit of valuing “harmony” and “tolerance”. I heard with pleasure that President El-Sisi once kindly stated that ‘the Japanese is a walking “Qur’an”’. It implies that the Japanese may be following the words of “Qur’an” without realizing it.

3. “Kono Four Principles”

- Based on Japan’s relation with the Middle East as such, I would like to promote the Middle East policy by launching the “Kono Four Principles”.

(1) Intellectual and Human Contribution

- First, Japan will drastically expand the intellectual and human contribution in the Middle East. So far, about 12,000 JICA experts and 3,500 Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers have worked together with people in the region. In addition, we will provide intellectual and human contribution, providing ideas and talents for conflict settlement. I pledge to work more proactively to deal with challenges facing the Middle East.

(2)Investment in “People”

● Secondly, Japan will increase investment in “People”. Human resources development is indispensable for peace and development in the region. The history of Japan’s modernization tells us that education is the key to development. Japan has already done much work in this area, but we will further our support in the education and human resources development and invest in those who create the future of the region.

(3)Enduring efforts

●The third principle focuses on patience and persistence in making our efforts. Once we sow a seed, we do not rush. But we also do not stop. We move ahead step by step in a steady manner until harvesting fruit. This endurance with long-term foresights is, I believe, Japan’s strength.

(4)Enhancing Political efforts

●Last but not least, I hereby declare that Japan will reinforce its political efforts in the Middle East. Japan has made efforts in socio-economic development and humanitarian assistance. This has led to the region’s confidence in Japan. We are determined to play a greater political role in the region. I myself will make maximum efforts toward this end. It is from this point of view that I have also visited Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, and advocated for the unity of the GCC countries.

4. New Kono Initiatives

●Now, these “Kono Four Principles” provide us with a new driver for the work ahead. Under the Principles, it is my pleasure to announce new five initiatives in our Middle East foreign policy.

(1) Upgrading the "Corridor for peace and prosperity" initiative

- We have not seen progress in the Palestine issue for a long time, although it is an indispensable element for peace and stability in the Middle East. The “Corridor for peace and prosperity” is Japan’s unique initiative. It encourages and supports independence of Palestinian economy through regional cooperation with Palestine, Jordan and Israel. A flagship project of the initiative, “Jericho Agro-Industrial Park”, or “JAIP”, celebrates the 10th anniversary this year. Today, seven Palestinian companies have already started their operation in JAIP, creating employment for over 130 people. After ten years of strenuous efforts, JAIP finally bore its fruits; yet, these are just first crops and more will come.
- To harvest more and better fruits, the Japanese government will strive to upgrade the “Corridor for the peace and prosperity”. We will aim to put “Made in JAIP” products into the markets of the Gulf countries, the Arab region, the West, and the whole world. As a start of this idea, Japan will contribute to capacity building at the border facilities and facilitating distribution system. At the same time, I would like to help promote the Japanese companies to do more businesses in Palestine.
- In addition, we will expand our cooperation from the focus on the agriculture to other fields. One such area would be IT-related cutting-edge technology, such as AI and programming. Although we find plenty of talents in Palestine, many of them live in a restricted environment. The IT can bridge these Palestinians to the rest of the world across the wall. I hope we can create the network of “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity”, by pushing forward this area.
- Japan will also actively engage in the "Corridor for Tourism" and the Red Sea-Dead Sea project. These will enable us to enhance the regional framework for cooperation, and to accelerate the economic development of Palestine and confidence building. It is my sincere hope that these work would help create an environment conducive to resuming the negotiation.

(2) The Multinational Force and Observers: MFO

- My second initiative is Japan's further contribution to the activities of the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai. Its essential role is to maintain peace between Egypt and Israel. Japan has been making financial contribution over the past thirty years. Under my new initiative to provide further support for the MFO, Japan will actively work toward realizing comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

(3) Expanding cooperation on Education and Human resources development

- As my third initiative, we will expand our investment in human capital in the Arab region. For instance, the "Egypt-Japan Education Partnership" or "EJEP" is a project to provide multilayered education and human resources development with holistic approach, such as the introduction of Japanese-style education, capacity building for teachers and instructors, as well as vocational training. Through this partnership, Japan aims to bring about 2,500 Egyptians to Japan for study and training in the coming five years. We have also welcomed students from the UAE to the Japanese school in Abu-Dhabi, and another 500 to actually study in Japan since 2013. The "Japan-Saudi Vision 2030" also aims to promote educational cooperation as one of its follow up agenda.
- I often hear from my friends in the region that they want more Japanese to come and study in the region. I know for a fact that the Middle East has many great educational institutions.
- I will give my full support to build cooperative ties and promote exchanges of high schools and universities between Japan and the Middle East. I will encourage the people in Japan to learn more about the Middle East. I will strive to lower the barrier for the Japanese to come to the region.

- Our efforts in education and human resources development will be expanded to more countries in the region. Japan will invite young Syrian students to study in Japan for the next 5 years. The first group of Syrian students arrived this year.

(4)Enhancing Political efforts

- Fourthly, Japan will have more political engagement in the region. The Japan-Arab Political Dialogue today is precisely the first step toward this end. Through participating in the annual Manama Dialogue, in Bahrain, we will foster our discussions on political and security issues with the Middle Eastern countries.
- Furthermore, I would like to propose strategic dialogues between Japan and the Arab region, not only in bilateral context, but also in the multilateral or regional context. I also believe it is important to create a platform in which both Japanese and Arab intellectuals can candidly discuss political, security, socio-economic issues, as well as education and culture on a regular basis.
- Japan has been advocating “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy”. A key for stability and prosperity of the international community is dynamism created by combining the “Two Continents” and “Two Oceans”, encompassing the fast growing Asia and Africa with huge potential, and the free and open sea-lane connecting Pacific and Indian Ocean. The Middle East is the linchpin of such connection of the Two; Asia and Africa as well as the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Without peace and prosperity in the Middle East, can there be no peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. Japan will reinforce dialogues between Asia and the Middle East, and improve the connectivity among Asia, Africa and the Middle East together.

- Japan has nurtured excellent friendship with all countries in the Middle East over many years. As such, Japan can, and will take its political initiative to promote dialogues, and build confidence among the parties.

(5)New humanitarian assistance for refugee and stability

- I often witnessed the huge impact of the Syrian refugees crisis on the economy and the society of the neighboring countries. For instance, Jordan hosts 1.3 million Syrian refugees, which accounts for over 10% of its total population. I have always argued that the international community must deal with this issue in unison. As my fifth and last initiative, I would like to announce around 25million dollars' worth of new humanitarian assistance for Syria, Iraq and the surrounding countries.

5. East Asia

- Lastly, let me briefly mention North Korea, which I will elaborate more on later in the sessions. On September 3, North Korea conducted the sixth nuclear test. Its magnitude was the largest in the history. This action constitutes a direct challenge to the international community, and it is intolerably outrageous. It poses unprecedentedly grave and imminent threat to peace and stability of the international community.
- This nuclear test was conducted shortly after the North's declaration to launch "a number of" missiles targeting the Pacific Ocean. It shows once again North Korea's will to press forward their nuclear and missile development programs. It also exposes the non-proliferation regime to a serious risk.

- The international community must put maximum pressure on North Korea. It is vital to adopt a robust resolution at the UN Security Council, which can make a significant cut in North Korea's foreign currency revenue, and effectively nullify its nuclear and missile development capabilities. We will aim to realize an earliest possible adoption of such a stronger resolution.
- I would like to urge countries in the world to strictly and fully implement the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.
- It is counterproductive to suggest necessity of dialogues with North Korea at this moment. We must keep sending a message that now is the time to apply strong pressure on North Korea. I seek support and cooperation from all of my fellow Ministers of the League of Arab States.
- North Korean workers sent to the Middle East are an important source of foreign currency revenue for North Korea. We should not allow any loophole for North Korea. I appreciate that some of the Middle East countries have already taken concrete measures to send them back to North Korea.

6. Conclusion

- International arena is another venue with much space for our cooperation. The United Nations needs a reform so that it will better reflect the international reality of the 21st Century. We want to work with the League of Arab States to begin text-based negotiations in the Intergovernmental Negotiations in New York during the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly.
- In conclusion, it is my sincere hope that fruitful discussions will be held in the Japan Arab Political Dialogue today. I promise that Japan will be committed to the Arab region, as a friend and partner of the Arab world, with the new initiatives I announced today.

● Thank you very much. Shukran jazilan.