

'My visit will serve as a milestone for stronger relations between Japan and Armenia' – foreign minister Taro Kono



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YEREVAN, SEPTEMBER 3, ARMENPRESS. Japan's minister of foreign affairs Taro Kono, who arrived to Yerevan on an official visit on September 2, has published an article about the roots of the Japanese-Armenian relations, the current high level of cooperation and promising future.

This is the first Japanese foreign ministerial visit to Armenia.

Below is the Japanese FM's article:

"I am paying the first visit to Armenia as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan on September 2 and 4. Last year, Japan and Armenia celebrated the 25th anniversary of their diplomatic relations. It gives me great honor and pleasure to set foot on Armenian soil and contribute to advancing our bilateral ties. Above all, it is my great pleasure that the Embassy of Japan to Armenia, opened in 2015, started its

operation at the new office since this February, and I am delighted to realize my visit to Yerevan in the year of developing Japan-Armenia relations.

We have many episodes linking our two countries together. Japan and Armenia have much in common, taking pride in their history, culture, and traditions from ancient times, being prone to earthquakes, and attaching importance to human resources amid lack of energy resources. In 1921, Eiichi Shibusawa, a Japanese entrepreneur and philanthropic activist, raised funds to help Armenian refugees, and Ms. Diana Apcar, then Consul to Japan, helped the refugees make their way to the United States. This event formed the foundation of our friendly relations today. Likewise, Armenian people who remembered the Japanese support over 1988 Spitak earthquake built a memorial monument for the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake which took place in 2011 next to the one for the Spitak earthquake, and a memorial assembly has been held every year. This episode also reinforced the ties between our two countries. Also, Dr. Akira Ishiyama, a Japanese physician and professor at UCLA, visits Armenia every year to be engaged in cochlear implantation activities for Armenian children. In 2013, the Government of Armenia, known for its rich IT human resources, awarded the Armenian Presidential Award for global contribution in the IT field to Mr. Tsugio Makimoto, Honorary Advisor of Japan's Society of Semiconductor Industry Specialists, for his distinguished achievements in the IT field. I am delighted if my visit promotes and disseminates our bonds among each of our nations, as well as the rest of the world.

The Caucasus Region is at the core of the junction connecting the world in all cardinal directions. The stability of this region is not only a matter of concern at the regional level, but is also directly linked to the peace and security of the international community. The Caucasus sees Europe in the West, while the Caspian Sea is located in the East of the region, overlooking Central Asia on the opposite shore. Further east is the major economic sphere of East Asia including Japan. I would like to promote cooperation towards the self-sustained development of the Caucasus Region, which plays a critical role as a gateway connecting Asia and Europe.

Japan's engagement in the Caucasus Region has consistently taken into consideration and will continue to be mindful of supporting state-building for the self-sustained development of the Region. I hope our country's experiences and lessons from its own pursuit of self-sustained development after the opening of the country in the mid-19th century will be shared with the Region. Japan will continue its contribution under the following two pillars.

The first pillar is human resources development. State-building begins with human development. Both infrastructure and institutions work effectively only when people can make full use of them. When Japan set off to rebuild itself as a new nation 150 years ago, its first focus was placed on developing human resources who can acquire leading-edge know-how and skills from the world, and bring them back to Japan. Human resources to mediate information are also necessary in order to share Japan's experiences with the Caucasus Region. In this respect, Japan will invite Armenian trainees to participate in training courses in the fields such as health and medical treatment, disaster reduction, transportation, natural resources and energy, economic policy, private sector development, agricultural and rural development, which take place in Japan

What Japan has always taken into account in state-building process is the rule of law. Laws and excellent legal professionals secure fairness and predictability in state-building. The development of legal professionals who execute the rule of law forms the cornerstone of state-building. Japan would like to contribute to the development of young legal professional in the Caucasus Region, taking advantage of opportunities such as invitation programs to Japan and human resource exchange.

Another priority is to nurture people in the Region who acquire deepen understanding of Japan to serve as a bridge between Japan and the region. From that perspective, we will continue its efforts such as support for Japanese language education, holding of cultural events to introduce its traditional culture, provision of Japanese broadcasting contents including animation and documentaries, and holding of an annual Japanese film festival many Armenian people look forward to.

What such human resources will aim is an "even more appealing Caucasus", attracting foreign investment, based on favorable infrastructure and business conditions in place. This is the second pillar.

To date, Japan has cooperated with Armenia for the stabilization, democratization, socioeconomic development, and development of a market economy of Caucasus, a region with full of importance and potential. For instance, we have worked together for building of Yerevan Combined Cycle Co-generation Power Plant, streamlined Yerevan's fire-fighting equipment for disaster risk reduction, backed up the enhancement of the competitiveness of domestic agricultural products and its overseas expansion through the One Village One Product movement, and helped to build schools and hospitals at the grassroots level.

In addition to basic infrastructure assistance and other supports, Japan is making efforts to conclude bilateral investment treaties with Armenia and countries of the Caucasian Region. Japan and Armenia have already signed the bilateral investment treaty, and it has been approved by the Diet in Japan this year. The investment treaties will create fair and predictable legal framework for Japanese companies investing in the countries, and will establish the conditions for attracting Japanese investment. Japan also would like to share knowledge of utilization of these framework with experts from the countries of the Region by training activities for government personnel of the Caucasus countries in investment treaties and arbitration.

Business growth will in turn expand the flow of people. Japan will work on simplifying procedures to make it easier for people of the Caucasus countries to visit Japan.

In addition, Japan will continue to assist Armenia in the field of disaster risk reduction, a common challenge for the entire Caucasus Region, in a proactive manner.

Based on these two pillars, Japan will support the self-sustained development of the Caucasus Region. Japan's collaboration with Armenia and the other countries in the Region is not anything closed. It will create organic links to that with other countries as well as international community and generate synergetic effect. I am confident that my visit will serve as a milestone for stronger relations between Japan and Armenia, as well as Japan and other Caucasian countries, and will be the first step to our promising future."