

Remarks by Mr. Kentaro SONOURA,  
Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr. Baqer Jabr Al-Zubaidi, Minister of Transportation and honorable guests,

Hello everyone.

Thank you for the introduction. I am Kentaro SONOURA, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

As a friend of Iraq, it is indeed a great joy that we have gathered here today for the inaugural ceremony of Port Sector Rehabilitation Project at Umm Qasr port.

This project is intended to support Iraqi people, who have embarked on a new nation building soon after 2003. This is the memorable first project in which Japan has extended its Yen loan to assist Iraq.

Two Japanese diplomats played a role in this project; Ambassador Oku and Mr. Inoue. They were tragically gunned down in 2003 much to their chagrin. Ever since, the project has been advanced by many Japanese hands which have passed on the will of the deceased. It is a deeply moving experience to be able to attend this inaugural ceremony today, which is a symbol of Japan and Iraq working together hand in hand on the reconstruction of new-born Iraq.

The ties between Japan and Iraq reach beyond this project. With regard to the recent tragic hostage incident of Japanese nationals, the people of Iraq have extended their hands of strong solidarity and cooperation to Japan. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation.

Some of you may have apprehensions that, by the shock of this incident, Japan might get cold feet on the relations with the Middle East.

However, as one of the oldest friends in working towards the stability of not only Iraq but the Middle East region as a whole, and also as a responsible member of the international community, we will promise you that nothing will change and Japan will continue our unique cooperation.

This is what I have told to the Speaker of the Council of Representatives and other leaders of the Iraqi government yesterday in Baghdad.

Unfortunately, the Middle East region has been torn by numerous wars in the past. Japan also has our own past of its land being burnt down and many precious lives being lost after the last world war. Yet, Japan has managed to rebuild to its current state after overcoming challenges by generous, compassionate and diligent Japanese people helping each other for the last 70 years after the war. Right now, people in the Middle East are making hard efforts towards regional stability and prosperity. I believe that there is a role that only Japan can play as a country which has long been walking the path of peace by making use of the post-war experience.

With regard to the humanitarian suffering which is a pressing issue, we have been providing humanitarian assistance to support the lives of displaced persons and their children, who suffers from starvation and maladies, shivering under coldness with no place to live. Japan will further expand such humanitarian assistance and steadily fulfill its responsibility in the international community.

Furthermore, Japan is ready to powerfully support the nation building and human resource development in the region by mobilizing its own strength of our contribution in the non-military field, so that the region can achieve a lasting stability and prosperity.

It is our strongest desire that the people of Iraq will march the path of rich and stable development. And, I firmly believe that the stability and prosperity of Iraq will become a powerful pillar of the peace and prosperity of the Middle East region as a whole.

Japan will always stand by your side.

Thank you very much for listening.