

**Statement by State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan,
H.E. Mr. Kentaro SONOURA,
International Conference on the Middle East Peace Process,
Paris, 15 January 2017**

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude for a series of efforts made by France for the Middle East Peace Process.

It is true that we tend to highlight the pessimistic aspects of the Peace Process, as it has been stagnant for a long time. However, I dare say there are seeds of hope, which Japan has sewn with patience, and I hope to touch upon these efforts today.

Japan introduced an initiative called the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” in 2006 cooperating with Palestine, Jordan and Israel.

The flagship project of this initiative, Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP), marks its 10th anniversary this year since it was inaugurated. Today, about forty Palestinian companies have entered into contracts with JAIP, and four companies have already started their operation, creating employment opportunities for sixty people as well as hope for the Palestinian people. In order to develop this project further, the four parties are

discussing the necessity to develop additional land as part of the second stage of JAIP.

Political support from Israel and Jordan was indispensable to promote the initiative. And I would like to emphasize that understanding and cooperation from Israeli side has been vital to reach the current stage of JAIP where some companies are actually operating on the ground.

That is to say, even under the current gloomy political situation facing the concerned parties, holding dialogues and promoting cooperation are not impossible. Last September, I hosted, together with representatives of Palestine, Israel and Jordan, the ministerial-level meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Unit for this initiative in Jericho. I witnessed those participants talking in earnest about the future of the JAIP. As the result of the meeting, the four parties agreed on continuous and close cooperation to support a viable Palestinian economy through regional cooperation.

Further trust-building is indispensable to reach the goals of the Peace Process. In this context, I would like to draw your attention to a unique program to invite Israeli and Palestinian youth as one group to Japan, which started twenty years ago. This program aims at promoting mutual understanding and building trust. It provides opportunities for those youth far from their home to go through events together and communicate closely with each other in Japan. To date, more than 200 youth have participated in this annual program and they have been talking about their hope for the future, saying that “one day, we want to live in peace with our children smiling and playing together”.

Of course, these seeds of hope are still maturing. However, I am confident that trust between the two parties has been built through those steady efforts. I would like to remind all parties that focusing on trust-building efforts with patience and creating a favorable environment for them to face with each other are much more needed in a time when we are facing lack of the momentum to resume direct negotiations.

Japan's assistance to Palestine amounts to more than 1.7 billion US dollars in total so far. I would like to announce anew that Japan will provide additional assistance amounting to about 34million US dollars, subject to the Diet approval. This is the investment for the stability in the region and for the future of Palestine. In addition, Japan's efforts to assist Palestine have expanded through the framework of CEAPAD where Japan cooperates with some East Asian countries, who are present here in this conference.

I would like to conclude my remarks by renewing Japan's determination to continue its patient efforts that contribute to solving this problem.

Thank you.

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