

Speech by Foreign Minister Taro Kono
on the occasion of opening Ceremony of the Phase 2
of Jericho Agro Industrial Park (JAIP)

H.E. Dr. Rami Hamdallah, Prime Minister of Palestine,
H.E. Ms. Abeer Odeh, Minister of National Economy,
Distinguished guests and
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalam Aleikm.

It gives me a great pleasure to be able to visit Palestine for the first time as Foreign Minister. I have personally been engaged in Palestine for a long time.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Jericho Agro Industrial Park (JAIP), which is a flagship project of the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative which was launched by Japan. Ten years ago, when I visited here, JAIP, there was nothing but one road. To be honest, I thought, "Does the 'Corridor' mean this road?" During the 10 years that followed, no matter how hard the situation might have been, we never stopped making efforts to move the initiative forward. As a result, the tree of hope called JAIP is growing so successfully from the seeds we planted here in Jericho.

Palestine continues to face difficult situations. Dialogue between the parties to conclude a peace agreement has been standing still for more than three years, and the situation surrounding Jerusalem has become complicated.

However, I believe that Japan, as a friend of Palestine, should make further efforts in its own unique way, both economically and politically, to contribute to realizing peace in the Middle East especially in these difficult times.

After I took office as the Foreign Minister, I made a strong commitment to the Middle East and placed it as one of the main pillars of Japanese foreign policy. In the speech I delivered at the first-ever Japan-Arab Political dialogue held in Cairo last September, I declared that Japan would play more proactive roles for stability in the Middle East. To that end, I said that Japan would intensify its unique efforts under the “Kono Four Principles”, which are (1) Intellectual and human contribution, (2) Investment in “People”, (3) Enduring efforts, and (4) Enhancing Political efforts.

Palestine is at the forefront of my Middle East policy. The enduring efforts by everyone concerned have borne fruit in JAIP. 8 companies are now operating and I heard that we expect a total of 12 companies operating in JAIP in January. JAIP will create more job opportunities for Palestinians, and will bring hope for building a future Palestinian state. Today, I welcome the launching of phase 2 of JAIP. I am determined to keep working on JAIP as a means to implement the “Kono Four Principles”, so that the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative will benefit more Palestinians and other people in the region by making further contributions to stability in the region.

In light of everything I have just said, today, I am announcing the upgrade of the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative. We will

expand the scope of our efforts and extend support to the ICT sector and to the facilitation of its logistics.

First, we will broaden the areas of our cooperation to include the ICT sector, with the view of assisting the creation of a network of the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity”, linking the Palestinian people with the world beyond the walls. We will build an industrial capacity building center in JAIP and open an ICT entrepreneur desk in it, in order to support Palestinian entrepreneurs in the ICT sector. We are also planning to send policy advisers to the Palestinian Authority through JICA, to support legislation of ICT related laws and policy making concerning entrepreneurship. Furthermore, we will invite talented and highly-skilled Palestinians to Japan and provide opportunities for networking with Japanese companies and visiting the ICT industry in Japan. We will also explore ways to cooperate with the Palestinian private sector including Birzeit University and the Palestinian Information and Technology Association for Companies. In addition, we intend to extend our cooperation for education and capacity building in the ICT sector.

Secondly, we will extend support towards facilitating logistics and seeking to realize distribution of goods produced in JAIP to the Gulf and the Arab region, the Western countries, and to the rest of the world. To that end, we will continue preparations to build an access road, bearing in mind the project underway to upgrade the border facility at King Hussein/Allenby Bridge.

JAIP is not the only Japanese support to Palestine. The Government of Japan will provide additional assistance of about 40 million USD, which includes 7.5 million USD in support of JAIP. With this, the

total amount of Japanese aid to support future Palestinian state building will be approximately 1.85 billion USD.

Japan will continue to channel our know-how and the energy that Asia has through Conference on the cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD), which celebrates the 5th anniversary next year, into Palestine. If circumstances allow, we plan to hold a Ministerial level meeting of CEAPAD around next summer. Japan will also carry on with its long-standing initiative of the “Israel-Palestine Youth Invitation Program” which celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. I had the chance to meet with the invitees from Israel and Palestine in Tokyo last month. Nothing would make me happier than to see promising Israeli and Palestinian youths cultivate friendships through their stay in Japan, and the bonding experience will become the foundation for the peaceful co-existence of these two states in the future.

Japan will strive hard with the people of Palestine to support their state-building. We, as friends of Palestine, wish to continue to plant seeds of peace and hope on this land and cultivate them hand-in-hand with everyone here today.

Shukran Jazeelan

/end