

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the European Union and the United Nations for hosting this Conference.

Seven years have passed since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in March, 2011. The humanitarian situation remains dire, and this month there were reports about the use of chemical weapons in Eastern Ghouta.

The use of chemical weapons is extremely inhumane. Japan can't accept it. It is indispensable to establish an international mechanism to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons so that such a tragedy may never be repeated. Japan intends to cooperate with its international partners to achieve this.

When I visited the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan in 2014, I realized the social and economic burdens assumed by Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and other neighboring countries which generously

accepted influxes of Syrian refugees. I would like to emphasize here that no real stability in the Middle East will be realized without a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Japan has fulfilled all of its pledge made at this gathering in April last year to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. In addition, we have already provided about 220 million USD of additional humanitarian assistance this year to respond to the new needs of Raqqa and other areas liberated from ISIL. Thus Japan's assistance to Syria and neighboring countries has exceeded 2.2 billion US dollars in total since 2011.

Furthermore, I am pleased to announce that the Government of Japan decided yesterday to provide new assistance worth 14 million USD to address the deteriorating situation in Eastern Ghouta and other parts of Syria and to help meet the needs of refugees in Jordan and Lebanon in areas such as food and health. This also includes an

additional assistance to UNRWA, which is facing a severe financial situation.

It is imperative that international humanitarian assistance reach all needy Syrians in a timely manner. To achieve this, Japan has been urging the Government of Syria to implement an immediate cease-fire and to improve conditions for humanitarian access. Moreover, Japan also contributed to the adoption of UNSC resolution 2393 on cross-border assistance last December as a then-UNSC member.

Since I took office as the Foreign Minister last August, I have made a strong commitment to the Middle East as one of the pillars of my foreign policy. Based on the trust Japan has gained as a good friend of the Middle East, I will work to enhance Japan's political efforts in the region. My participation as the first Japanese Foreign Minister in the Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region does indeed show this commitment.

Early this month I received Dr Naser al-Hariri, President of the Syrian Negotiations Commission in Tokyo, and told him that Japan would contribute to the progress of the United Nations-led political process. Japan will proactively engage in the Geneva Process.

To help all Syrians foster aspirations for the future, Japan remains committed to playing a responsible role for the stability of Syria in both the humanitarian and political spheres.

At the closing of my speech, some words on donor fatigue. Many governments are now in debt. More taxpayers are asking why the government is spending their money abroad. Sooner or later, the international community needs to create some kind of international taxation to directly raise enough money to help alleviate the pain of people like the Syrian refugees. The global economy is growing, and number of refugees are also growing. We need a new mechanism, so that no one is left behind.

Thank you very much.