

(unofficial translation)

Dear H.E. Mr. Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan, H.E. Mr. Kamilov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, distinguished participants,

I am UTO Takashi, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.
On behalf of the Government of Japan, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the High-level International Conference, which is successfully taking place today.

Central Asian countries are located at the center of the Silk Road since ancient times, and have been connecting products and people as the intersection of various civilizations.

Central Asia is a region also today known as its geopolitical importance. Strengthening the connectivity of the region is essentially important not only for sustainable development of the intra-regional economy, but also for stability and prosperity of the international community.

From this point, the Government of Japan strongly supports the initiative of H.E. Mr. Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan to strengthen regional connectivity.

The enhancement of regional connectivity can be achieved by efficiently and organically promoting various efforts such as infrastructure development for strengthening transportation capacity, the facilitation of cross-border procedures for products and people, and the activation of economic activities. Regarding transportation infrastructure, Japan has provided support for railway development in south part of Uzbekistan. By connecting multiple locations with the fastest route, freight transportation to foreign countries including Afghanistan will be also efficient.

Besides "connecting" across national borders, it is also crucial to have the perspective of "managing" travel and transportation appropriately. Japan has set up liaison offices at the borders of Central Asian countries in cooperation with the UNODC. In addition, Japan provided inspection equipments to customs of Uzbekistan.

Another key is the development of "human resources".

Japan has contributed to the development of people in Central Asia for many years.

We provide scholarships so that young government officials can obtain a degree at Japanese universities. So far, 668 young Central Asian government officials have studied in Japan.

JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, Nagoya University, and other organizations have conducted training in a wide range of fields, including customs, which are important for improving connectivity.

I am confident that such human resource development ensures efficient administration that meets international standards, and leads to the development of a favorable business environment.

In 2004, Japan launched the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue ahead of other countries and has supported regional cooperation. We highly appreciate the positive contribution of Uzbekistan.

At the recent Foreign Ministers' Meeting of this Dialogue, with the participation of Afghanistan, we exchanged views on regional cooperation including border control issue.

I would like to conclude my statement by hoping that the Central Asian countries – a crossroad of civilization – will further develop as a free, open and stable region in cooperation with various partners.

Thank you for your attention.