

Peacebuilding Experience and Knowledge from Asia to the World

Remarks by Mr. Kenzo Oshima, JICA

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Professor Dr. Osterwalder, Rector of UNU

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Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very grateful for the invitation to speak at this peacebuilding symposium and I thank the Gaimusho and the UNU for the kind invitation. I am particularly delighted to be here today because I was one of those invited to the inauguration of the Peacebuilders Center in Hiroshima six months ago. Also present at that inauguration was Ms. Carolyn McAskie, who is the head of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in New York HQ and my former colleague in the UN Secretariat. On that occasion I addressed the participants as a just-retired Ambassador to the UN and past Chairman of the UN PBC. This morning I will be speaking in my present capacity as JICA's Senior Vice President.

After six months, I am delighted that all the trainees have completed the courses, including a few months of practical work experience on the ground overseas. I would like to extend to all the Peacebuilders Center participants my warm congratulations on the successful completion of their training at the Center. I wish also to pay tribute to Prof. Shinoda and his team of Hiroshima University for the efforts they put into this remarkable project.

Post-conflict peacebuilding typically involves a number of international actors on the ground. Often, such as in the DRC, Sudan, Afghanistan and Timor Leste, there is the presence of UN PKO forces or UN-authorized security forces with their military and civilian components. Then, there are UN and other humanitarian agencies and NGOs that provide emergency relief; and often there are international and bilateral donors that contribute to peacebuilding mainly for the reconstruction and development of the country in question.

It is generally accepted that there are three key conditions for a successful peacebuilding process: a) maintaining internal security by preventing recurrence of

violence, b) ensuring good governance in the host country, and c) ensuring a seamless transition from conflict to reconstruction and development. What I would like to do in the next few minutes is focus on the last point, i.e., transition from conflict to rehabilitation and reconstruction, and talk about some concrete examples of peacebuilding support activity carried out by the Japanese bilateral donor agency, JICA. In fact, JICA as a technical cooperation and development agency has been engaged in peacebuilding activities in several post-conflict countries in Asia and Africa.

The first case I wish to take up is an African country that is put on the agenda of UN PBC and which I had the opportunity to visit during the course of my recent swing in Africa – Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone is a West African country thousands of miles away from our shores, but JICA has been there for the past few years in support of its rehabilitation and reconstruction. It is a small country with a population of 5 million, wedged between Guinea to the north and Liberia to the south. It is a country rich in natural resources including gold and diamonds. The country, in fact the whole sub-region in this part of West Africa, suffered from disastrous internal conflicts and political turmoil and the resultant atrocities and widespread destruction for over a decade in the 1990's and early 2000s.

In this world, it is an irony, oft-repeated in Africa as elsewhere, that the existence of rich natural resources could prove a curse rather than a blessing for the population. This is very unfortunate; Sierra Leone was one of those caught in this irony. The words “conflict diamond” became a vogue and some of the horrible stories were depicted in the Hollywood movie film “Blood Diamond”.

Be the matter as it may, the hostilities were finally brought to an end in January 2002 and since then the country had been struggling to recover from the wounds of the civil war, to find at peace with itself with the support of the international community. And thanks to the presence of the regional ECOWAS forces and UN PKO (UNAMSIL), security and stability in the country were able to be maintained, although very fragile. And large-scale international emergency relief operations had been mounted by UN and other international humanitarian agencies and NGOs to assist the people in dire need of help. As a result, the country were able to avoid the worst case scenario – sliding back to conflict again.

However, the daunting challenges remained, and they included all-important

security sector reform – reestablishing its national army and police forces. Also, the government faced the urgent need to consolidate the gains of peace and show to the people the “dividends of peace”, however modest, in order to maintain the minimum necessary conditions for the stability of the country and to start rebuilding the shattered economy and society. Therefore, the country badly needed international donor assistance and support quickly.

In other words, like many other countries in a similar situation, a post-conflict Sierra Leone faced the typical issue of the so-called “gap” or “continuum” between emergency relief and reconstruction and development. This became evident as the international humanitarian agencies and NGOs began to draw down their relief operations and leave the country once the emergency phase was over. They had brought emergency relief during and shortly after the civil war, but as they withdrew, the country was left without the necessary resources and personnel to prepare for the next phase. Also, with the lessening of the media attention the international donor attention also waned – the so-called CNN effect was in play in reverse.

It was in such a situation that JICA, a development agency, decided to step into the fray in Sierra Leone in an attempt to fill this transitional gap, in however a small way. First, a JICA survey mission was sent to the country in September 2004, and it was soon decided to start several small-scale rehabilitation projects in 2005. The target area chosen for JICA’s bilateral intervention in agreement with the government was a remote district in the northwest of the country that was one of the most severely affected and destroyed during the civil war – the district called Kambia, in the border area with Guinea, hundreds of miles away from the nation’s capital city of Freetown.

The aid program that JICA set out to promote in Kambia included two main components: The first is child and youth development. Children and youth are generally among the most vulnerable in a post-conflict setting. And it is also very true in Sierra Leone. In fact, some of them were recruited as child soldiers during the fighting. Thus this intervention goes to the heart of peacebuilding. This project on children and youth focuses on building local community’s capacity to develop themselves through education and community development. It targets 33 schools in the district communities and contains a number of micro-projects, which cover various activities such as construction of classrooms, kitchens and toilets, start-up

of school gardens, provision of teaching and learning materials, income-generating activities, village roads and storage construction, and so on – so that children are sent back to school, that they experience the joy of learning and heal the wounds suffered from the conflict. The project also extends assistance to the parents who missed education due to conflict through provision of non-formal education, such as literacy training and agricultural and vocational training.

The second component targets a broader rural development in the district and JICA's support extends to agriculture development, water, and health. On agriculture, for example, rice is a staple food in this part of Africa and moreover the district is a potential rice bowl for the whole country, but its productivity is very low. Improvement in rice productivity therefore made good sense for the betterment of food self-sufficiency of the rural communities in the district. The agriculture development project is supported by a couple of Japanese agriculture experts deployed on the ground who work together with the local community authorities and village farmers. JICA is also rehabilitating a destroyed community water supply facility that can provide safe drinking water to 12,000 people in the community. Additionally, another project for improvement of health and health referral system is coming on stream very soon.

During my January visit to Sierra Leone, I went out to the Kambia district in the company of six cabinet ministers who flew in the same helicopter to inspect the projects. Obviously, the actual needs even of these relatively small district communities are far greater than JICA's resources and capacity will allow. But JICA has made a small but a good start in assisting rehabilitation and then reconstruction of several conflict-damaged communities in a remote corner of Sierra Leone.

Obviously, looking at the country as a whole, Sierra Leone's needs are far greater and urgent. Included in the government's top priority list are the basic infrastructure such as electricity supply and rehabilitating key roads, providing jobs particularly for young people, accelerating institutional capacity building, and developing human skills, among others. The Japanese Foreign Ministry has responded to meet the needs in the power sector as a matter of urgency. Other measures are under study.

These are also priority areas identified by the UN in its Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework for Sierra Leone, established by the UN Peacebuilding Commission last December. JICA tries to align its projects with the UN's

Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework for Sierra Leone.

Beside Sierra Leone, JICA is involved in peacebuilding support activities in other post-conflict settings, like Mindanao in the Philippines, Timor Leste, Afghanistan, Burundi, and South Sudan, etc.

In Mindanao, for example, Japan supports the peace accord process politically and materially, and in October 2006, Japan dispatched a JICA-supported senior advisor, Mr. Nagaishi, who is in charge of reconstruction and development of Mindanao, to the International Monitoring Team (IMT), which is lead by the Malaysian commander. At the same time, JICA has been engaged in rehabilitation and development work in some of the conflict-affected communities in Mindanao. In Afghanistan, JICA is responsible for over a dozen development projects in education, health, vocational training, road construction, master plan for urban development of the capital city Kabul etc., and there are more than 50 JICA staff and aid experts are deployed there.

It is clear from JICA's experience that there cannot be a fixed or "one-size-fit-all" strategy for peacebuilding. What is needed is a flexible, broad menu of support package that should be applied according to the prevailing specific situations and requirements on the ground, such as Basic Human Needs (BHN), economic infrastructure, institutional/human/capacity building, landmine issues, or reintegration of ex-combatants.

In the implementation of peacebuilding support projects, JICA pays close attention to a few points, namely:

- (1) moving in quickly and staying engaged for the long haul as much as possible;
- (2) targeting the socially and economically vulnerable;
- (3) ensuring that local communities and people can benefit from its support;
- (4) ensuring the safety of JICA and contracted staff engaged in peacebuilding support work, often in less than satisfactory conditions.

In conclusion, as aid agency, JICA has accumulated experience and knowhow from years of technical cooperation and development assistance in developing countries which can be put to use in dealing with post-conflict situations. And that is where JICA's comparative advantage is. But based on our own experience, what is most important is the fact that there must be the availability of well-experienced professional staff who can be deployed on the ground and can do

the job and implement the projects and programs put in place. Staff experience and staff quality are a matter of critical importance for any development project in any country, whether in a normal, peacetime situation, or in a post-conflict situation. But the importance of well-experienced staff cannot be over-emphasized for operations in post-conflict settings.

In this sense, human resource development is a key issue. We need professional, experienced personnel who can carry out development assistance in a conflict sensitive manner. The more such personnel become available in Japan and Asia, the more and the better contribution Asia can make to the world in peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

And this is the significance of the training done at the Peacebuilders Center. In that spirit, I was reassured that Foreign Minister Mr. Masahiko Komura expressed in his key note address yesterday Japan's determination to strengthen its commitment to peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It is our hope that this worthy project of the Peacebuilders Center will continue, that young people from Japan and Asia and from other parts of the world will be able to continue to benefit from the opportunity of learning and gaining experience, and that they can prepare themselves for their future career in this vital area of international peace, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

(End)