



Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations

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Statement by Ambassador Yoshifumi Okamura
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at the Debate on Agenda Item 37 "the Situation in the Middle East" and
Agenda Item 38 "the Question of Palestine"
70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

24 November 2015

(Check against delivery)

Mr. President,

I would like to thank Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the General Assembly, for convening this important meeting. I wish to address both agenda item 37, "the Situation in the Middle East" and agenda item 38 "the Question of Palestine".

1. Opening

Mr. President,

I would like to pay tribute to H.E. Ambassador Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, in celebration of yesterday's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Furthermore, allow me to extend my sincere condolences and our heartfelt sympathies to those affected by the tragedies that recently befell upon Ankara, the Sinai, Beirut, Baghdad, Paris and Bamako. Japan condemns in the strongest terms these vicious terrorist attacks and stands united with the governments and people of the countries affected.

2. The Situation in the Middle East

Mr. President,

As the recent attacks will attest, instability in the Middle East has repercussions far beyond the region. The international community must be united in squarely confronting the challenges at hand, including the threat of terrorism.

However, crisis management will not suffice. We must also address the underlying factors of instability, which extremists are feeding upon. These include the frustration of the people, especially the youth, who are increasingly losing confidence in their economic prospects and political solutions to the crises of the region.

Against this backdrop, the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is indicative. Its Preamble reminds us that “there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development”. I believe that the experiences in Asia are tangible examples of this observation. Roughly half a century ago, the Asian region witnessed a series of conflict and economic strife. But today, political turmoil has become quite rare due to equitable growth and prosperity in the region. Perhaps we may consider the situation of the Middle East with these experiences in mind.

3. The Situation in Palestine

Allow me to elaborate. With regards the Question of Palestine, a series of resolutions on the issue have been adopted at the General Assembly. The adoption of these resolutions, whilst important, is not enough. In light of the recent outbreak of violence and the growing costs of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, tangible progress on the ground is urgently needed.

Therefore, Japan deeply deplores that Israel has recently approved the construction of 454 settlement units in East Jerusalem. Not only are settlement activities violations of international law, but they accentuate tensions and severely undermine international efforts for the resumption of peace talks. Furthermore, while we recognize the necessity to maintain order, we call on Israel to exercise its law enforcement with proportionate measures and refrain from collective punishment including the demolition of homes, which may exacerbate an already volatile situation.

There is a clear need for the resumption of peace talks towards a two-state solution. But the stagnation of the process must not stop us from moving ahead where progress is possible. The International community can make a positive difference.

To this end, Prime Minister Abe visited the region in January and called on both leaders for the resumption of peace talks. On the ground, Japan has contributed 1.6 billion dollars for Palestinian development, firm in our belief that a viable economy underpins peace.

One such example is the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park, a flagship project under the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” Initiative. The project is expected to provide up to 7,000 jobs with annual economic benefits of 40 million US dollars. We are proud to report that the project is now in operation. Perhaps it is an auspicious sign that the first company, the Palolea Company is a firm that manufactures olive based products, when olives are a symbol of peace. By bringing together Israelis, Jordanians and Palestinians under our assistance, Japan seeks to show the dividends to be gained through cooperation and reverse the cycle of violence and mistrust. Furthermore, through CEAPAD (Conference amongst East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development), we will continue to channel the experiences and resources of East Asian countries for Palestinian Development.

4. The situation in Syria

Mr. President,

Allow me to address the situation in Syria, which is facing one of the worst humanitarian crises of our generation. Against this dire humanitarian situation, Japan has extended 1.1 billion dollars in aid. This entails not only life-saving relief but also basic services such as education. For example, with our eyes set on the eventual resolution of the crisis, Japan is making sure that education opportunities are not truncated. 2.6 million Syrian children that have been put out of school, which is why we are contributing to the “Back to Learning” program in partnership with UNICEF .

The worsening humanitarian situation highlights the need for a political solution to the crisis. We thus welcome the convening of the recent meetings in Vienna in providing a much needed political horizon ahead. In this regard, Japan reiterates its position that there are no military solutions to the Syrian crisis. Japan will thus continue to work with the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and other relevant parties towards a political solution to the crisis.

5. Closing Remarks

The increasing volatility of the Middle East calls for concerted efforts by the international community. Japan as an ardent promoter of the concept of Human Development, firmly believes that peace and sustainable development go hand in hand. Firm in this conviction, we will continue to cooperate with the international community in tackling the imminent challenges at hand and cementing the foundations for peace and stability of the region.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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