



Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations

866 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017 Phone: (212) 223-4300 · www.un.int/japan/

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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Masahiko Koumura
Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan**

**Item 45 Culture of Peace
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**Mr. President,
distinguished delegates,
ladies and gentlemen,**

I am honoured to have the opportunity to address you today as the Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Taro Aso, and on behalf of the Government of Japan.

We are gathered here today at this high-level meeting of the General Assembly on dialogue among religions and civilizations in response to the strong initiative taken by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Japan welcomes the convening of this meeting, just as it welcomed and attached great importance to the Muslim Dialogue held in Mecca in June and the World Conference on Dialogue held in Madrid in July.

In January 1999, as Foreign Minister of Japan, I made a speech in Ramallah entitled “Building a New Bridge between Japan and the Middle East toward the Twenty-first Century.” I urged then that we profit from the lessons we learned during the century that was just coming to a close, filled as it had been with war and conflict, and make the twenty-first century a time of peace and prosperity. Instead, in the decade that has passed since I was in Ramallah, what we have had in the Middle East and too many other regions around the world is more conflict and incidents that have only served to heighten tensions.

Such disorder, such strife and conflict, has many causes, and tremendous efforts have been made to address them, in the United Nations and other fora. Yet if we are ever to succeed in devising better, more durable solutions, it will be because the parties concerned and the international community have the political will to do so. It will be because, breaking with the past, we choose to engage in dialogue rather than resort to violence. Certainly, it is impossible to resolve a conflict, today as in the past, unless, as an irreducible minimum, each of the parties first recognizes the other's existence, which is to say, unless each feels and demonstrates respect for the other's ethnicity, culture and religion.

We need also to take into account the impact that globalization has had on the world. Through the rapid expansion of trade and the development of information and communication technologies, the daily lives of many people have been made easier. At the same time, globalization has removed many of the barriers that earlier separated groups with different identities and different ways of life. As they now confront one another, conventional authority and order are being shaken. New tensions are piled on old, a situation that can be expected to continue until a new, more stable order is established.

We have an obligation now to pool our wisdom so as to maximize the benefits of globalization and minimize the harm it can do. People who face a crisis of identity are vulnerable. When a small band of extremists succeeds in inciting even the slightest friction between ethnic or religious groups, the fires of distrust and hatred are stoked and yesterday's peaceful neighbors suddenly become wary of one another, or worse. We should not regard differences in culture or ideology as handicaps. Far from it. They are assets, which can infuse a society with creativity, causing it to flower, and endow its members with greater tolerance and even appreciation of what each has to offer. For this to happen, however, greater political leadership is required.

Equally pressing, in confronting the global issues of our time, the nations and regions of the world must work in concert, in a firm and courageous manner, to secure the common interests of humankind, which extend far beyond petty differences.

This is clearly how we must confront the current financial crisis, which is unprecedented in scale. In contrast to the dark era nearly eighty years ago when the Great Depression plunged the nations of the world into the Second World War, today we

know we need to coordinate the policies we adopt if we are to surmount this challenge and end the vicious spiral of financial turmoil.

On the issue of climate change, the leaders of the G8 said at the Hokkaido Toyako Summit earlier this year that they shared the long-term objective of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least fifty percent by the year 2050. They understood that failure to do so would lead to even more global warming and deal a massive blow to humankind and the environment of the planet that is our home.

The same can be said about the Millennium Development Goals. We know that the first victims of natural disasters and of conflicts, no matter where in the world they occur, are always the poor. Leaving behind those who are weak and vulnerable makes a society unstable and impedes the progress of the reforms for which we have promised to work.

With this in mind, Japan has been striving to make the most effective use of ODA and every other tool at its disposal to assist the nations and regions of the world in their efforts to promote stability and prosperity. As an example of such regional efforts, I would mention those being made to create the Corridor of Peace and Prosperity, based on the concept of working collaboratively on projects to promote regional cooperation and prosperity in the Middle East. Japan has also been extending cooperation to countries working to improve their educational systems, develop their human resources and help women to live full and independent lives.

We know that in the course of human history there have been long periods during which peoples whose identities reside in their different cultures, religions and ethnicities have co-existed peacefully. Tolerance, religious symbiosis and co-existence have been the norm among followers of Islam and in the societies of the Middle East in general. In Asia, whether in India or China or elsewhere, different religions have managed for much of history to exist in proximity to one another without conflicts erupting.

For its part, Japan has benefited since ancient times from the products of the civilizations of China and India. Japan has also absorbed the fruits of Western culture, including universal values such as freedom and democracy.

Precisely because Japan's unique culture assumed its present form in this manner,

it knows the value of dynamic exchange and interaction with other cultures. Japan therefore intends to contribute actively to dialogue and the promotion of harmony among the religions and civilizations of the world. It is already cooperating with Islamic countries in conducting the Dialogue among Civilizations between Japan and the Islamic world. And we shall continue to engage in exchanges of this kind.

In closing, let me once again express my heartfelt appreciation to King Abdullah for the initiative he has taken and salute the conviction and courage shown by all those who have supported it. I hope that at this meeting, we shall reaffirm our determination to take strong, joint action and ensure solidarity and peaceful co-existence among the peoples of the world.

Thank you.