

Lecture delivered by H.E.Ms. Yuriko Koike, member of the House of Representatives on Thursday May 28, 2009, on the occasion of the establishment of the Sasakawa Middle East Islam Fund:

“Towards Further Promotion of Japan-Middle East Relationship”

Venue: Conference Hall, the Nippon Foundation, Tokyo

- Mr. Jiro Hanyu, Chairman, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am Jiro Hanyu, chairman of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. Today we're celebrating the establishment of The Sasakawa Middle East Islam Fund, which has just been inaugurated. Thank you very much for being here today.

I would like to express my appreciation in particular to Ms. Yuriko Koike, a member of the House of Representatives who has spared time from her very busy official duties to be here. I also would like to thank the members of the diplomatic missions, especially ambassadors and other representatives of Islamic countries in the Middle East, and the executives of the Nippon Foundation, for providing support and advice on establishing and running this foundation.

The Sasakawa Middle East Islam Fund will work to promote mutual understanding between Japan and Islamic countries in the Middle East. It will also engage in personnel exchange from both sides. Japan and the Middle East Islamic countries have always enjoyed very good relations. But the core of that friendship, fostering mutual understanding and promoting exchange, has been rather limited.

So for those of us in Japan the politics, economics, culture and history of Middle Eastern and other Islamic countries need to be more widely known. We need to create more opportunities to learn about these issues. And the same can be said in reverse. The Middle Eastern and Islamic countries need to learn about Japanese culture, politics, and economics. We hope to enjoy your continued support and cooperation in promoting this initiative. As this fund has just been established, we would like to widely promote knowledge of the Middle East among Japanese people, and vice versa. We also would like to engage in exchange among young people, as well as exchange among opinion

leaders. We would contribute to create the human networks between the Middle East and Japan through the exchange programs.

Our fund will be responsible for promoting forms of exchange between the Middle Eastern Islamic region and Japan that will continue for many years into the future. Your support and cooperation will be essential. I would like to ask you to continue providing us with your support. With these words, I conclude my words of greeting. Thank you.

- H.E.Ms. Yuriko Koike, Member, the House of Representatives

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the introduction. My name is Yuriko Koike. I am a member of the House of Representatives.

First, I'd like to express my heartfelt congratulations on the establishment of The Sasakawa Middle East Islam Fund. I hope that the relationship between the Islamic countries of the Middle East and Japan will deepen further through this fund.

I'm going to be speaking in Japanese today. I won't be speaking in Arabic. Please select channel two for an English interpretation.

His Highness the Crown Prince of Qatar is visiting Japan and I was just greeting the Prince. I was asking, when does Ramadan begin this year? It starts on the 20th of August this year. Is that correct? The reason I asked is because of the breakfast meeting. It's in the evening but we call it a breakfast meeting, because it is breaking a fast in the truest sense. We have to prepare for *iftar* meeting, which will be available at the Prime Minister's Official Residence. For ambassadors and other representatives of Islamic countries in the Middle East who are here today, I feel sure you have been attending this *iftar*, a dinner party to break the fast. I know that during the month of Ramadan, you observe the custom of having meals only in the evenings, after the sun goes down. We have been offering such a meal at the Prime Minister's Official Residence since a few years ago.

I want to promote this tradition in Japan. And I felt that the best way to make it known to people in Japan would be to start at the top. I began by educating former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. I told him that *iftar* is made available at the Elysée Palace in France or at the White House in the United States. And Mr. Junichiro Koizumi graciously accepted my suggestion to start a tradition of hosting *iftar* at the Prime

Minister's Official Residence. As you know, the Prime Minister continues to change quite often here in Japan. But the tradition of *iftar* will continue, regardless of the identity of the next prime minister, and even though the date advances about fifteen days each year, according to the Islamic calendar.

I have visited Jordan recently. Because I have assumed the position of chairperson of the Japan-Palestine Parliamentary Friendship League, I was in Jordan also in February, which was right after, or should I say right in the midst of, the bombing of the Gaza Strip. I was able to see with my own eyes what was happening in the region. My aim was to report to the people in Japan, and in particular, to Diet members and, by doing so, to clarify what Japan should do. That's why I visited Gaza and also Jordan.

This time, I visited Jordan two weeks ago to attend the World Economic Forum on the Middle East, held at the Dead Sea. This is part of the so-called Davos Summit. Such meetings are frequently held in the Middle East, and this time it was held at the Dead Sea. I was the only Diet member from Japan. I am always invited and several other Japanese people are invited to this summit. As the Diet is in session, and as we must pay our own fare, it's not always easy to go. But I have convinced myself that I must participate in this event and have always attended this meeting.

There are many workshops and of course there's a plenary session. There are informal meetings. I was one of about fifteen participants in one of these closed meetings. The participants consisted of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Amr Moussa, the Vice President of Iraq, Mr. Tareq Al-Hashimi, and also the Foreign Minister of Bahrain who is a dear friend of mine. These were some of the representative dignitaries from the Middle East. From the United States, Mr. John Kerry, a candidate for president a few years back, was there. This brings to mind the fact that I, too, was once a candidate for high office: prime minister of Japan. In any case, these are examples of the people who participated in this informal conference.

We discussed various topics relating to the revitalization of Iraq, or about suicide bombings in various regions. Cultural context and educational background were discussed. We also discussed the press, the mass media. That was one of the topics on the agenda.

For my part, I mentioned the following points. The Arab and Middle East Islamic

countries don't necessarily speak the same Arabic, and their cultures may not be uniform. Each region has pride in its culture and traditions. Sometimes there is rivalry among the nations or regions. In the Gulf nations, they are enjoying great prosperity and wealth. And so much development is advancing in this region, as you well know. Last year, following the Lehman Brothers collapse and the financial crisis, some conjectured that development would slow down. But I believe that this is a temporary thing and that in the future, development will resume and the Emirates will again be competing to build a high-rise at least one metre higher than those in neighbouring nations. The coastal regions, harbours, and even airlines will develop further. On the subject of airlines, the United Arab Emirates has Emirates Airline and Etihad Airways. Like this, the Arab countries are moving dynamically.

In any case, there's great competition for development. But there's one concern that I have. Nuclear power plants are being promoted by many countries: the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Egypt. These nations are trying to develop nuclear power plants and there's great competition in this.

Countries like Japan that lack resources depend on nuclear power plants for peaceful purposes. I was once minister of the environment. Safety is of course a foremost concern, but with the condition that nuclear power plants are being operated safely and with great caution, I am positive for utilization of nuclear power that economizes our resources. Following the major earthquake in the Chuetsu region of Niigata Prefecture, the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant has finally resumed operations. I think this will contribute to a two-percent reduction in Japan's CO₂ emissions. We relied more on oil & coal after the earthquake, when we had to stop the nuclear power plant. And that increased carbon emissions by three to four percent, out of 9 percent increase in all. So we hope that CO₂ emissions can be curtailed by about two per cent by restarting the nuclear power plant.

Many of the Middle Eastern Islamic countries have good reserves of natural resources. They have gas and oil. Nevertheless, they're very interested in building nuclear power plants. On the other hand, we have the issue of Iran's development of nuclear power. And we have Israel, whose possession of nuclear weapons is frequently cited as a double standard. In addition to that, Arab nations and Gulf nations are engaging in the development of nuclear power plants. This is not something we have any right to oppose. But Japan's peaceful and safe technology in developing nuclear power plants

could be transferred to the Arab countries in the Middle East. It would be meaningful. And when we consider global warming, it might indeed be a good idea that such nations start using nuclear power plants. Oil-producing, gas-producing nations in the Middle East: if they intend to prolong their stockpiles of gas or petroleum for future generations, then I think building nuclear power plants is a very useful idea for mankind.

However, problems arise when countries resist or try to block inspections of nuclear facilities, or engage in murky activities. There are many cases of such problems. The most recent example we can think of in the East Asia is the issue of North Korea. They have announced that they have carried out nuclear tests. The international community must make a clear statement and take a clear stand against such actions.

Now let me come back to the meeting that was recently held by the Dead Sea: the Davos forum. I talked about three things. One was how in Prague, on April 5th, President Obama made a statement referring to the moral responsibility of the only nuclear power in the world to have used a nuclear weapon. The second thing was the issue of countries, such as North Korea in East Asia, which carry out nuclear tests. The third point was the nuclear status of Iran and Israel. The nuclear situation in these two countries is not a challenge for the Middle East alone. It could have enormous worldwide repercussions. On the other hand, as we foresee that more and more nuclear power plants will be built throughout the world, we have to ensure that safety is being properly addressed. Also, as technology advances, it will become much easier to possess nuclear arms technology. It will be much more compact and lighter. This is going to be very risky when we consider terrorists' actions.

My suggestion was, "What about having an Arab version of the IAEA within the Arab League?" By forming such an agency, the Arab countries would be able to speak of the need for transparency before the international community made such demands. The IAEA is having an election. And I hope that your vote for the next director general of the IAEA will be for the Japanese candidate. I hope the ambassadors present here will vote for the Japanese candidate after Dr. El-Baradei. Dr. El-Baradei was originally an Egyptian diplomat. He is certainly a professional expert. Perhaps he can be invited to the Arab League, as a key person. He has a lot to offer. You might form this kind of organization with him to ensure that your nuclear power plant development is properly adhering to safety constraints. I think that might be a good idea as a way to eliminate some of the concerns that the world has at present. I made these suggestions based on

my own opinions.

Mr. Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, said that this is a very useful idea. Rather than the United States or some other Western nation saying this, it would be very different for Japan to propose an idea like this. When we talk about the nature of the relationship between the Middle East and Japan, the important thing is for Japan to think what message it wants to convey to the Middle East. This proposal must benefit the countries in the Middle East and at the same time must develop Japan's potentiality to play an international role further more. But first, Japan must take stock, and consider how much power it really has.

And when Japan takes stock of its power, what would be most effective is to reflect on our current activities involving nuclear generators, and our history as a victim of the atomic bomb. We must think about how Japan's experience and knowledge can be utilized to bring about a positive effect in the Middle East. Secondly, as a former minister of the environment, I think we can use Japan's environmental activities to make our point. I'm not just talking about solar energy, solar batteries, and ideas to resolve global warming. I'm talking about other areas where Japan has expertise.

For example, there was an environmental conference organized by Ambassador Yoshiji Nogami. Water is another major issue in the Middle East. Japan's sewage technology and approach to using water can be widely disseminated in the Middle East. I think that would also be very significant for Japan as well. In the 20th century, CO₂ was the major issue. The 20th century was the century of endless CO₂ emissions. But in the 21st century, in addition to restricting emissions of CO₂, we must focus on the issue of H₂O. This issue dates back many centuries. I mention it because issues involving water are threatening to make an impact once again. Japan's expertise can help solve not just aspects of global warming, but contribute to water pollution control, waste reduction, and waste management.

I also want to refer to education. Youth exchange was mentioned earlier by Mr. Hanyu. This is extremely important and it is one of the goals of this Sasakawa Middle East Islam Fund. As I said, I was just talking with the Crown Prince of Qatar. I mentioned to him that I have visited Qatar many times. And here is another area where the Middle Eastern countries are competing in a positive way: education. Georgetown University has a Qatar campus, and so does Texas University. The Sorbonne, as well. Major

universities from countries all over the world have campuses in the Middle East. In Egypt too, there's a graduate school which is called E-JUST. This is a forum for the study of Japanese technology. Of course, higher education is important. But in the Middle East, one way in which Japan can contribute to education and share Japan's message is at the elementary level of education. In various Arab states, the Japanese Kumon method is spreading. Kumon-style arithmetic and mathematics are being promoted. And the Suzuki Method of violin playing is also being promoted. I believe some of you saw this method for yourselves at the Budokan.

The transmission of Japanese morals or ethics or arithmetic can be very useful especially during the early years of the education. Because these can form the basis of character-building. I hope that Japan's abilities can be shared with the Islamic countries in the Middle East. None of this goes against Islam, I believe. If you are willing to study the Japanese mind, I think you will see wonderful outcomes two or three decades from now. They are true human resources that every country could appreciate. I think this will become a cherished treasure for both of us in the future. I look forward to, I dream of, that kind of exchange.

In the relationship between the Middle East and Japan, there are many channels through which we can promote such an initiative. But we need to focus on a way in which the message from Japan can be heard very clearly. I hope The Sasakawa Middle East Islam Fund will play a central role. I hope I too can be of some help in my own humble way.

I have mentioned Japanese education, and I myself attended Cairo University. The first time I went to Egypt was in 1971. At the time, there were 70,000 to 80,000 students at Cairo University. When we had exams at Cairo University, even students who didn't attend class properly would come to the exams. These tests would take place outdoors. They would put up tents in fields for the students taking exams. I recall a stray dog coming up to me while I was taking an exam. But in any case, Cairo University was huge. Recently some branch schools have been established. I'm not sure if my way of counting it is correct, but when I went to Cairo University for the centenary celebration several years ago, they told me that the total number of students at Cairo University was 250,000.

In Japan, we have the problem of a falling birthrate, whereas in Arab nations the population is exploding. Meantime, they are facing another issue of foreign labor. They

have to deal with the issue, how to treat these people, when the economic situation is changing. When I went to Gaza this time, even though there are so many tragic bombings and people lack gasoline or food, I noted that the population was increasing steadily. They had a general election in Israel. One political statement by the far-right Avigdor Lieberman was that at the time of an election in Israel, they would not allow people of Arab background to vote. One out of four people born in Israel is non-Jewish. So, I think this issue of population is extremely important now. Way back before the time of the Old Testament, the Hebrew population was causing concern. The Pharaoh in Egypt was so concerned that he ordered the death of all newborn Hebrew boys. That's why Moses was hidden in a cradle in the bullrushes. All these matters are related to population. I might be repeating myself but because I was minister of the environment, I always feel that this issue of population is the key to resolving global warming. And how can we deal with fossil fuels? We must use them efficiently as the shared heritage of humanity. Because Japan does not produce petroleum, I think Japan has been able to devise very useful technology.

Japanese schools started with small gatherings of students called *Terakoya*, learning to read and write and study the abacus, *Soroban* as we would say it in Japan. In the Arab world, children would gather to recite the Qur'an. They would chant the verses of the Qur'an, delightfully, like singing. That's how the Madrasah began. Reading, writing, using the abacus or reciting the Qur'an -- I believe that Japan and the Arab world have various things in common, and the way in which education began may be one example. I hope that The Sasakawa Middle East Islam Fund will be a forum to promote that kind of exchange. Thank you very much.