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CHALLENGES FOR JAPANESE ODA

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It is highly regrettable that Japanese official development assistance (ODA), which enjoyed the top donor status throughout the 1990s, has been shrinking in the past years both in terms of its budget and disbursement against a background of the prolonged adverse economic conditions and critical public opinion.

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When we look at the world, poverty is increasingly recognized as the hotbed of terrorism, and its reduction, mainly through such measures as the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, has become a common challenge for mankind. In other words, the demand for development assistance is stronger than ever. Given such a global trend, it is imperative that Japan stave off any further decline in its ODA. It has long been a sturdy pillar of Japan's international contributions and it should continue to be.

The Japanese government must exercise strong leadership and patiently make efforts to gain public understanding for the expansion of ODA. At the same time, under the prevailing situations in Japan, it is also true that we must focus its ODA on important targeted areas. Let me discuss here the two areas, as I see it, relatively new and most important for Japan's future ODA, namely, peacebuilding and global warming.

Commitment to Peacebuilding

The ethnic and religious conflicts that have erupted since the end of the Cold War have dealt a serious blow to long-term efforts at development: they kill innocent citizens and children and generate a large number of refugees. As a result, the international community has come to share an understanding that peace and stability are absolute prerequisite for development. After a series of trial-and-error dispatches of UN peacekeeping forces and multinational forces in the field of the prevention and settlement of conflicts, the international community has also come to recognize the importance to take comprehensive measures that include plans for the rebuilding of war-torn societies. Japan has stressed this point in its ODA policy particularly since 2000. In his policy speech delivered in Sydney in May 2002, for example, then Prime Minister Koizumi affirmed the importance of, and Japan's commitment to, this area of peace and nation building.

I was involved for example in the peacebuilding processes of Cambodia and East Timor in the 1990s, cases now judged successes. Elsewhere as well,

Japan has assisted in the reconstruction and development of countries in conflict situations across the board such as Palestine, Kosovo, and Rwanda.

Japan's current ODA Charter, revised in 2003, specifies peacebuilding as a priority issue, stating that, in addition to emergency humanitarian assistance, Japan will extend bilateral and multilateral assistance flexibly and seamlessly for peacebuilding in accordance with the changing situation, ranging from assistance to expedite the ending of conflicts to assistance for the consolidation of peace and nation-building in post-conflict situations. Japan has been actively engaged in the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan in line with this new policy. The demand for Japan's involvement in this area is only expected to grow.

As President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, I tried to visit as many countries and regions in conflict situations as possible from 2001 through 2003. The locations I visited include Afghanistan, Iraq, northern Sri Lanka, and the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. What prompted me to do so was my belief that Japan can and must play an important role in these peace processes. Since Japan's Self-Defense Forces cannot yet fully participate in UN-sanctioned peace operations due to the constraints of the pacifist Constitution, strengthening this type of civilian assistance will certainly grow in importance.

Climate Change Initiative

Japan should also play a leading role in the global fight against climate change. It is expected to make use of its innovative technologies accumulated over years through its environment policy for building a post-Kyoto Protocol framework and realizing a world with less carbon dioxide emissions. The Japanese government has made environment one of its priority areas in ODA policy since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and has actively assisted China, Southeast Asian countries and other parts of the world to tackle their environment problems.


However, Japan's assistance on global environment issues, particularly climate change -- an issue of burning concern for the international community -- is

still relatively limited, having had to wait for the surge in the recent years in international public opinion demanding measures to address this issue. Things are, in fact, starting to change drastically in the past few years. The recent adoption of the Bali roadmap at the COP13 of the UN Convention on Climate Change, which charted a new negotiating process to succeed the Kyoto Protocol based on the stern warnings given in the reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), will certainly facilitate further the trend.

In May 2007, then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced Japan's climate change initiative, Invitation to "Cool Earth 50," in which he proposed a target of reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by half from current levels by 2050 as a common goal for the entire world. He also expressed Japan's intention of building a new financial mechanism that would help developing countries tackle various problems arising from global warming. Most recently in Davos, Switzerland, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda unveiled a "Cool Earth Partnership" and announced the intention of the Japanese government to extend in this context of the financial mechanism a substantial amount of 10 billion US dollars, while expressing his firm resolve to lead, as this year's G8 Chair, discussions on the post-Kyoto framework concerning the highest priority issue of climate change.

The importance of cooperation with Asian countries, which include the world's major greenhouse-gas emitters like China and India, cannot be stressed enough. And, needless to say, as a country with innovative technologies and abundant experience in environmental protection measures, I believe Japan can and must definitely play an important role in regional measures against global warming in Asia. Through ODA and other private sector measures, including transfers of latest technologies, Japan can contribute to such efforts as the reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions, forest preservation, the promotion of clean energy use and the prevention of droughts and the rise in sea level.

I sincerely hope Japan to exercise strong initiatives in the significant events scheduled this year in Japan, such as TICAD (the Fourth Tokyo International

Conference on African Development) and the G8 Toyako Summit in Hokkaido. 

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