

United Nations Day

Future challenges require growing role, global youth

A future of greener, cleaner and low-carbon growth

Ban Ki-moon
SECRETARY-GENERAL, THE UNITED NATIONS

This year's observance of United Nations Day occurs at a time of transition for the world and for the U.N.

Humanity has entered the era of sustainability — with a global commitment to fulfil the great promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this, the organization's 71st year, we have 17 goals to propel us toward a better future for all on a healthy planet.

The world is also moving at long last beyond the mindset that viewed the burning of fossil fuels as the path to prosperity. At a time of record heat, member states have embraced the Paris Agreement on climate change in record time. This landmark measure will enter into force on Nov. 4. Across that historic

threshold lies our best chance for greener, cleaner, low-carbon growth.

The U.N. is also in transition, from its eighth secretary-general to the ninth. I have been honored to serve "we the peoples" for the past ten years. Together, we have put in place some solid foundations for shared progress — which we must build on by working even harder to empower women, engage youth and uphold human rights for all. But we have also suffered enormous heartbreak — including unresolved conflicts causing immense suffering throughout the troubled Middle East, South Sudan, the Sahel and beyond. On these and other front lines of violence and disaster, courageous U.N. staff continue to rise to the occasion and respond to the plight of the vulnerable.

I thank people across the world for their support — and urge all to give their full backing to Secretary-General-designate Antonio Guterres in continuing our global mission of peace, sustainable development and human rights.

Michiru Mekata
SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

This year, Japan is celebrating 60 years of U.N. membership. On this occasion, U.N. Information Centre Director Kaoru Nemoto met with Kenzo Oshima, a well-respected international figure who has held senior positions at top-notch institutions in and outside Japan, including the U.N. and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The two exchanged views on the past, present and future of the U.N. and Japan, as well as various issues confronting the world. The summary of their dialogue follows:

Nemoto: Japan has been providing emergency humanitarian relief, assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction and peacebuilding support over the years to various needy countries as a U.N. member.

Oshima: Yes. Though the activities have been humble, such longstanding sincerity to contribute to the global community has won the trust of numerous countries around the world. This external evaluation is invaluable, and we should maintain and expand the activities in the future.

Nemoto: Regarding your positioning in the global arena, can you tell us about your U.N. experience?

Oshima: I was with the U.N. for five years from 2001 until 2007, first as under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs (OCHA), and, after a short break, as the permanent representative. In September 2005, the U.N. summit was held commemorating its 60th anniversary and it adopted a landmark outcome document that established new institutions such as the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council. The document clearly outlined the global community's responsibility to promote human security, a concept advocated by Japan. The year 2005 was also when the group of four coun-

tries (Japan, Germany, India and Brazil) made concerted efforts to reform the U.N. Security Council. The following year marked the 50th anniversary of Japan joining the U.N. and I have fond memories of a commemorative event, featuring the New York Asian Symphony Orchestra. It provided an opportunity for up-and-coming Japanese and other Asian musicians to perform, who otherwise would have had little chance of public exposure. In October 2006, Japan assumed the Security Council presidency, when North Korea conducted its first nuclear test, resulting in the first sanctions against that country. In that month, too, the council made a decision recommending Ban Ki-moon to replace Kofi Annan as secretary-general.

Nemoto: What was your role under Annan at the dawn of the 21st century?

Oshima: My principal role was to promote humanitarian advocacy and coordinate emergency humanitarian relief activity by U.N. agencies, in cooperation with the non-U.N. humanitarian players. At the time, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Angola and Liberia were in dire need of sustained relief aid, and in Asia, Afghanistan presented serious humanitarian challenges, particularly when it was under Taliban control. On one early 2001 visit to Afghanistan and neighboring countries, I carried Annan's personal letter to seek support to facilitate relief convoys crossing their borders into Afghanistan. I also met Taliban leaders to discuss the situation to allow access for humanitarian workers to reach those in need of food and shelter. In addition to visiting distressed areas, there was also fundraising. Unfortunately, U.N. humanitarian activities were frequently under-funded, and my OCHA office was no exception, so I spent a lot of time begging donors for money to do our job.

Nemoto: What was the main challenge for you under such



Kenzo Oshima (right) discusses the past, present and future of the U.N. with Kaoru Nemoto at the U.N. Information Centre in Shibuya Ward on Oct. 5. SATOKO KAWASAKI

circumstances?

Oshima: One big issue was how to balance the activities of the humanitarian workers against their safety. In war zones and high-risk areas, their lives were constantly at risk or sometimes even sacrificed. As such, we had many serious internal discussions regarding this issue. Personally, it was physically and mentally one of the toughest, most exhausting times in my career. It meant a lot of long travel, jet lag, meetings with leaders and a wide range of humanitarian players to discuss difficult issues, often finding myself battling to explain things clearly and sway others in English.

Nemoto: Is that why you stress youth education and involve yourself in education in your hometown Hiroshima?

Oshima: Absolutely. I now spend time running a seminar at Hiroshima University to assist students, from various faculties who are interested in future international careers, to improve their English communication skills and broaden their understanding of global issues. I also help a newly launched project in Hiroshima Prefecture for high school students, who aspire to international work. As in the

university seminar, the project provides intensive courses to improve the students' English communication and debating skills and sessions on peace-related subjects fit for Hiroshima, which experienced and recovered from a nuclear bombing.

Nemoto: I agree such support for youth is necessary, and we must lay the groundwork for their global perspectives. That is also why seven U.N. institutions hold joint career fairs for students and youth in Japan. We are sowing the seeds, but it takes time for them to grow.

How do you see Japan's future standing at the U.N.?

Oshima: The possibility of Japan becoming a permanent member of the Security Council is a delicate and difficult issue. It is clear the U.N. system is becoming outdated and requires significant reform after 70 years, especially the council. Annan used to say, "There is no reform of the U.N. without reform of the council." The 2005 G4 campaign, in which I was fully involved, went a long way toward exploring that possibility. Though the G4 efforts failed, it became clear many countries supported Japan's bid to become a permanent member, recognizing



Japan's substantive U.N. contributions over the years. The process also revealed hurdles and pitfalls that lie in the way. Foremost of all, the permanent members are very reluctant to let go of their vested interest — the veto.

What can one expect 10 years on? The option for Japan and others seeking permanent membership is whether to stick to the position taken 10 years ago, or whether to seek an achievable compromise. In this regard, in February 2015, a group of distinguished international figures that call themselves "The Elders," made public a four-point proposal for council reform. The group, founded by the former President of South Africa, the late Nelson Mandela, and chaired now by Kofi Annan, suggested a compromise solution on the question of enlarging council membership, saying "Let the states which aspire to permanent membership accept instead, at least for the time being, election to a new category of membership, which would give them a much longer term than the two years served by the non-permanent members, and to which they could be immediately re-elected when that term expires." If accepted, this formula would open the way for de facto permanent members.

Personally, I tend to think that to get out of the present stalemate, a compromise needs serious consideration. Under the circumstances, aspirants would have to understand that, as Annan says, "Half a loaf of bread is better than no loaf of bread."

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We celebrate United Nations Day annually to commemorate the Oct. 24, 1945, establishment of the United Nations. For 71 years, the U.N. has been a vital forum where the world's peoples can work

together to identify common problems, agree on feasible solutions and take joint action.

On this U.N. Day, we should celebrate, too, the 60th anniversary of Japan's U.N. membership. Japan joined in 1956 as the 80th U.N. member state, and in the six decades since has been an active participant in the decision-making processes of the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council, and a reliable contributor to the U.N. system's efforts to deal with pressing global problems.

It is fitting that this significant anniversary comes while Japan is once again serving on the U.N. Security Council. Each year, five nations are elected by the General Assembly to serve a two-year term on this body. Japan has the distinction of having been elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council 11 times — more than any other nation. Thus, Japan has served on the Security Council for more than one-third of its tenure as a U.N. member state, and has often played crucial roles on such issues as the North Korean nuclear crisis, Afghanistan, and peacebuilding.

Asia has, for several decades now, been the fastest rising continent on the globe, economically and otherwise. In the Security Council, however, the continent's growing role in world politics is not adequately reflected; China is the only Asian permanent member. It would be fitting for Asia to be better represented on the Security Council, including by

enhancing Japan's role.

For the past three decades, Japan has remained the second-largest contributor to the U.N.'s regular budget (behind only the United States). It is also the third-largest financial contributor to the U.N.'s peacekeeping operations and among the world's top-five donors of humanitarian aid.

Outside the financial realm, Japan, too, has played important and constructive roles in numerous U.N. activities and has made significant intellectual and personnel contributions to the U.N.

Japan was among the key architects of the Hyogo and Sendai frameworks, the key international agreements governing international action and responsibilities on disaster risk reduction, and served as chair of the international conference where the Kyoto Protocol (aimed at restricting carbon emissions and slowing climate change) was hammered out.

Japan is also an important troop contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations; over the past 25 years, more than 10,000 Japanese military, police and civilian personnel have taken an active part in 14 U.N. peacekeeping missions. Distinguished Japanese have proudly led four U.N. peace operations, in places as diverse as Afghanistan, Cambodia, Timor-Leste and the former Yugoslavia.

In light of the new peace and security legislation approved by the Diet last year, going forward Japan's voice on peacekeeping issues is likely to carry even more weight within the international community.

Japan has expressed its commitment to undertake a larger role within the U.N. As testament to this ambition, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe recently addressed the U.N. General Assembly for the fourth time — twice as often as any of his predecessors — and co-hosted (with U.S. President Barack Obama) the September 2015 Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping.

In closing, I would be remiss if I did not mention Japan's

vital role in the establishment and continuing operation of the United Nations University (UNU).

Japan's offer in 1973 to host the UNU headquarters in Tokyo, and its accompanying contribution of \$100 million to establish the UNU Endowment Fund, was the impetus that made U.N. Secretary-General U Thant's vision a reality, playing an important role in bringing the world of research closer to the U.N. and informing evidence-based policymaking. Though UNU has grown to be a global system of institutes, Japan remains the heart of UNU.

In my role as rector of UNU, I thank the Japanese government for its generosity and foresight in 1973, and for its continued support throughout UNU's 40 years operation. Additionally, I congratulate the Japanese people on the upcoming 60th anniversary of Japan's U.N. membership.



Dialogue of Civilizations for World Citizenship

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Illustration: Yoshinosuke Matsumoto

Yamatotake and the Conquest of the Kumaso: The Origin of the Name Yamatotake

One day, the rebel leader Kumaso Takeru (The Brave of Kumaso) assembled his clan for a great feast. Hearing of this, Prince Kousu disguised himself as a young maiden and made his way there, concealing a dagger inside his garments. Kumaso Takeru soon caught sight of the noble-looking maiden and invited her to his chamber, egged on by drunken spirits. The night wore on, and Takeru was soon incapacitated with drink. Seeing his moment, Kousu took the dagger and thrust it through Takeru's chest. Takeru was powerless to resist, and could only raise a hand to stay Kousu's movement. "Wait! Hold back and let me speak," he begged, summoning his last reserve of strength. "Pray, tell me who you are." "I am Kousu, son of the sovereign Woshirowake," replied the prince. Takeru continued: "I am the strongest in this land. None could surpass me in power of arms; none has been as valiant as you. For this, let me give you a name after my own. From this day forth, may you be called Yamatotake, the Brave of Yamato," Kumaso Takeru declared, before quietly breathing his last. And with that, Yamatotake went on to complete a famous victory over the Kumaso. *Later known as the Emperor Keiko

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