

Dear representatives from Minato-ku office,

Fellow Minato-ites and participants, event organizers, distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor to deliver this speech today at this event celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the declaration of Minato-ku as City of Peace. On behalf of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and the Embassy of Afghanistan in Japan, first, we would like to express our sincere congratulations on this occasion and wish that the celebrations are successful.

As we have been stationed in Minato-ku since the current embassy building was established in 2008, Minato-ku has always been cooperative with the embassy, along with the kind assistance of Tokyo Metropolitan Police. It is their constant kind cooperation that enables, not only the Afghan embassy, but also those of other countries ---as it is one of the most foreign mission populated local areas in Japan--- to concentrate on working on our mission, and build successful relationship between Japan and the respective countries. This basic task cannot be realized without the peaceful environment that the local community provides.

This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary for Minato-ku since it adopted the declaration of the City of Peace on August 15, 1985. 30 years can be rephrased as one generation of mankind. There has been quite a transformation of the international environment as well --end of so-called Cold War, revolutionary innovations of technology, especially in information sectors, etc. Throughout the years, despite a few bumps, it can be seen as one of the peaceful 3 decades of the world overall. If you are 30 years old or older, what comes up in your mind first by recalling events that took place in the last 30 years? If you are younger, what image do you have of the last 30 years? For Afghanistan, unfortunately, the last 30 years was the time of war; but fortunately, it has ended and we are now moving forward to rebuild a peaceful nation once again.

Why is peace important? This may be a simple question to answer, yet surely difficult to realize for most people. The world knows very well and admires Japan for reconstructing itself to be the world's top economic powerhouse today from the ashes of the war that ended 70 years ago, reminding itself of the lessons of the war. Once a peaceful nation, Afghanistan, too, has experienced the shakeups of peace and the stability of the nation in recent years. And now, the country has been stepping out of the "transitional decade" into the "transformation decade" to make sure the entire efforts paid by Afghans with the years of generous support from the international community, will be paid off by rebuilding a peaceful and stable nation of Afghanistan.

Allow me to briefly describe the history and culture of Afghanistan and the region by sharing our experiences here.

Bordering six countries, Afghanistan is strategically located at the crossroads of the north-south and east-west trade routes of south-central Asia. Evidence suggests that civilization dates back as far as 10,000 years at the site of Dasht-e-Nawar, west of Ghazni province in central Afghanistan. The Bronze Age saw a rise of village and urban communities with trade links to the Indus Valley, Central Asia, Iran, and Mesopotamia. With its important location and political influences being so ideal, Afghanistan soon became one of the hubs of the Silk Road.

Afghan relations with Japan can be seen in 1907, when General Sardar Ayub Khan visited Japan with his delegation. The first Japanese who visited Afghanistan, in 1922, was Hisao Tani, a military officer. Formal ties were established in 1930, by signing the Friendship Treaty and opening of diplomatic missions in our respective countries. Since then, there has been no record of Afghanistan and Japan having ever fought directly. For over 80 years, Afghanistan and Japan have had a friendly relationship. Official exchange of visits was marked in 1969 by Their Majesties King Zahir Shah and Queen Homaira to Japan. In return, Their Imperial Majesties Emperor and Empress, and then their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess, visited Afghanistan in 1971.

The recent struggle in Afghanistan originated back in December of 1979, when the Former Soviet Union's military started the invasion of Afghan soil. A violent reversal of our forward progress began when the military of the Soviet Union entered our territory and began the systematic destruction of our institutions of governance and our natural and man-made structures, and forced scores of our people to seek refuge in other nations. Estimates place figures of around some 1.5 million killed and one fourth of our population sought refuge outside the country during the decade of the Soviet invasion. Then, the withdrawal of the Soviets left Afghanistan with a power vacuum and lawlessness which resulted in the rise of the oppressive regime – the Taliban. Under the Taliban regime, an extremist interpretation of Islamic law and rules were enforced. For example, men must grow beards; women were completely banned from public and social activities, even girls going to school was prohibited; entertainment was not allowed. One of the most notorious actions of this imposed and oppressive regime was the destruction of the statue of Buddha in Bamiyan. The lawlessness left after the invasion by Soviet Union created a vacuum for the group to rise to 'restore order,' ironically however, they enforced it so harshly that people's freedom and liberty, once enjoyed in Afghanistan, was greatly jeopardized.

Taliban's teaching, despite their claim, is not Islam. Justifying terror attacks and killing, unequal treatment of women, neglecting education and technology, violating human rights –none of these are found justifiable, but rather condemned in the Quran. As the name of our country obviously shows it is the Islamic Republic; the country's base stays still on the Islamic constitution. One of its pillars is to protect human rights and secure equal treatment for all. Meanwhile, the Taliban have been attacking the government by armed force and not accepting the constitution. How do they call themselves Muslims, and what is their teaching based on?

Then, as most of you know, the war in Afghanistan started following the 9/11 attack on the United States. Afghanistan became, once again, the battlefield of the militaries. After decades of destruction of basic infrastructure, government organizations and institutions since 1980s, and oppression by the undemocratic regime, Afghanistan was further destructed not only physically but also mentally and in danger of collapse.

This is the experience of Afghanistan until 2002, when Afghan leaders, fighting for peace, and the international community formed the international conference in Germany and signed the Bonn Agreement. Since then, the new Afghanistan has been working to rebuild, hand-in-hand with the international donors. Afghanistan has achieved much in the last 13 years: presidential elections were held 3 times along with parliamentary elections; security control of the entire country has been taken over by the Afghan National Army together with the national police; today we have over 10,000 schools with more than 10 million students in attendance, of which 40% are females, while there were only 1 million students, all boys, and no girls were allowed, in 2002; 500 students are given scholarship to study in graduate schools in Japan under JICA's PEACE program; child birth and mother's mortality rate have significantly decreased, as well as a number of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis.

Japan has helped Afghanistan in many ways in many sectors and through various projects at a time when Afghanistan was suffering the most. Japan has invested in Afghanistan's future, and has made a greater investment in peace. As the saying goes, "A Friend in need, is a friend indeed." Even after the March 11<sup>th</sup> earthquake, Japan expressed continuing support for Afghan reconstruction. The following year in July, 2012, the Japanese government hosted the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, an international conference at this very Prince Hotel to share, exchange, coordinate, and seek a better future for a peaceful Afghanistan. Throughout the over 80 years of friendly relationship, Japan has been a good friend of Afghanistan, and has proved time and time again that when Afghanistan was in need, Japan was a friend indeed. Allow me to also share with you that Afghanistan, too, stood with Japan soon after the earthquake disaster. Then President Karzai paid a visit to the Japanese Embassy in Afghanistan to sign the condolence book to show his sympathy and encourage Japan. It was said to be the fastest record of a country's leader visiting a Japanese embassy in the world after the earthquake. The people of Afghanistan also collected donations and it was delivered by the Japanese Red Cross Society, hoping it will be used for the reconstruction of Japan - the country, the friend, that had always helped Afghanistan during its hardship. For all these efforts, support, and accomplishments, Afghanistan is forever indebted to the noble nation of Japan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I would like to state that a continued partnership, a friendship, is a rewarding prospect for both Afghanistan and Japan, for the region, and for the world. Particularly since Afghanistan is a landlocked country, ensuring peace and stability not only inside the country but also for the

region is crucial for Afghanistan and for the rest of the world. And this is not just for now, but we ought to remind ourselves that “our duty to the generations that will follow is to hand over into their keeping a society built on the brotherhood of all people and a natural environment that is flourishing and beautiful.” (Declaration as a City of Peace, Minato City 1985)

Allow me here to once again express my congratulations and great appreciation for having given us this opportunity today. Long live Afghanistan-Japan friendship! Thank you very much.