

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Koro Bessho
Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations
At the Security Council Open Debate on the Agenda Item
“The Situation in the Middle East, Including the Palestinian
Question”

17 January 2017

Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you Special Coordinator Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I would like to begin by welcoming the adoption of resolution 2334 last December. With a two-state solution increasingly in jeopardy, it was important for the Security Council to demonstrate a clear commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The resolution demands that Israel cease settlement activities, it also calls for immediate steps to prevent violence against civilians, and calls for collective efforts to launch negotiations.

I would like to stress that the resolution must be taken as a whole. The cessation of settlement

activities will not bring about peace on its own, and all other efforts must also contribute to the re-launch of political dialogue. Japan calls upon the relevant parties to show commitment to the resolution.

Mr. President,

Little progress has been seen in the Middle East peace process, and future prospects are dim.

Japan rejects all acts, incitement, and glorification of violence. Terrorist attacks such as the vehicular attack on 8 January cannot be justified for any reason, and Japan firmly condemns such acts of terrorism. At the same time, disproportionate use of force by Israel is also a concern. Persistent violence leads people from both sides to lose faith in a two-state solution.

Japan reiterates its firm position that

settlement activities are in violation of international law and Israel must immediately freeze such activities. Japan has on various occasions urged Israel to reconsider its policy. Nevertheless house demolitions continue in 2017, with over 70 buildings demolished in the first week of January alone. These activities physically erode a two-state solution.

Unity among Palestinians is also important. Preparation is underway for the first session of the Palestinian National Council in 20 years. Japan hopes that the Council will be inclusive, promote unity, and bolster the efforts to achieve a two-state solution.

In Gaza, the humanitarian situation is dire. People suffer from severe lack of electricity, water, and places to live. These hopeless conditions are ruining peace efforts, feeding radicalism and do not

benefit either party. Assistance from the UN and other humanitarian institutions is vital, and their political space must be maintained. Furthermore, we call for the easing and eventual lifting of the Gaza blockade, while duly taking security concerns into account.

Mr. President,

Given these impediments to the peace process, what can we do? Japan is undertaking a three-part approach: political dialogue, confidence-building, and economic assistance to the Palestinians.

Japan believes that dialogue is the only way to achieve peace, and calls upon both parties to resume direct negotiations. Japan appreciates the various initiatives undertaken by the relevant parties.

We welcome the joint communique issued at

the Ministerial Conference hosted by France on January 15, underscoring international support for a negotiated solution with two states living side by side in peace and security. State Minister Sonoura attended the meeting from Japan, outlining our efforts so far in his statement.

Japan also welcomes the powerful call by US Secretary of State Kerry for Israel and Palestine to make the difficult choice for peace. The determination shown by the new Secretary-General at the open debate last week to actively engage in mediation and peacemaking is a hopeful sign.

Turning to economic assistance, Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP), which Japan has promoted for the past 10 years together with Palestine, Israel and Jordan, will increasingly contribute to the Palestinian economy and

trust-building in the region. We must also remember the importance of investing in future generations. Last November, Japan initiated a technical assistance programme to revise math and science texts and curricula in Palestine. This augments our previous assistance to build schools and underlines our commitment to future generations.

On confidence-building, Japan promotes regional cooperation on the agricultural sector with Israel, Jordan and Palestine, which also enhances mutual trust as well as the development of agriculture in Palestine.

At grassroots level, we invited 10 future leaders of Israel and Palestine to Japan last month, as part of the programme we have been running for 20 years. Participants spent time together familiarizing themselves with the history of

Japan's post-war reconciliation and development, while exchanging views and developing mutual understanding amongst participants. One participant from Palestine commented that it was the first time he had an opportunity to talk to Israelis other than soldiers. I firmly believe that peaceful environment enables such exchange of views and mutual understanding.

Recently, I heard from Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, that young people in Gaza have extremely limited opportunity to exit Gaza and much less to interact with Israelis, and I recognized the importance of continuing this programme.

Mr. President,

In concluding, Japan reiterates that peace is

only achieved through direct negotiations between the parties. I urge both sides to make decision for peace. Alongside support for political dialogue, Japan, for its part, will continue to promote confidence building that enables such dialogue, and offer economic assistance that keeps a two-state solution viable.

I thank you, Mr. President.