

“Civil Society Organization”

Policy Speech addressed by Prof. Akiko Yamanaka

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Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my utmost pleasure to be back here to join once again the lively discussions at the Doha Forum. I commend the State of Qatar and His Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar for organizing this important gathering, whose continuation has made it a beacon of hope for the entire region of the Middle East. And hope is what is always most important. Without it, you have no self-esteem. When you have no self-esteem, you care less about your friends and neighbours. We can talk of civil society only when people care about each other.

From Tokyo to Hiroshima, and indeed throughout Japan, the Japanese are paying ever more attention to what is happening in this part of the world. I say this for good reason. Each and every day, our proud sons and daughters in uniform are helping Iraqis rebuild their nation. The troops have been in Iraq strictly for humanitarian support purposes such as water supply, school repair, medical service and so on.

They have shot not a single bullet. Indeed neither have they anywhere anytime for the last SIXTY-ONE years. They smile in Iraq when the locals are happy. They are saddened when the locals cannot be happy. The presence of our service men and women on the soil of Iraq has connected the Japanese with the people in the Middle East like never before. I am hence most pleased to be with you here, as what you do matters more and more for the Japanese, like never before.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For the Iraqis to bear the unbearable burden to successfully achieve nation building, compassionate support from their neighbours is indispensable. When the people in Iraq are going through the harshest period of their nation building processes, I believe the Doha

Forum as a beacon of hope can make an even bigger difference by providing a pool of knowledge to, and by remaining a source of inspiration for, the people in Iraq.

Let me start my brief remarks on civil society by denying some of the myths often associated with the idea of civil society. Civil society is NOT a luxury commodity available only for affluent countries. Civil society does NOT always follow democracy. It sometimes precedes it. On whether civil society is available only for rich nations, one can rather say that it is needed most in less-developed areas.

There was an experiment my Ministry conducted jointly with the World Food Program some time back in the Sub-Saharan region. It was a school lunch program whereby schools buy foods that the local people produce. And the schools provide pupils with lunch meals. The pupils were able not only to eat lunch for free at the schools but also to bring the meals back home. This process enabled their parents to get earnings three times: first, by selling their crops to the schools; second, by not needing to cover their children's meal expenses; and third, by not needing to spend money for the meals that their children bring back home. The parents hence earn revenues once in cash and twice in-kind. Something remarkable happened as a result. When the schools provided the pupils with lunch meals, the school enrolment ratio for the girls went up by 8%. When in addition they allowed the pupils to take the meals back home, the same ratio for the girls shot up by 19%. This is a proof that neither religion nor societal tradition hinders girls from going to schools. Money was the ultimate hindrance, and when their parents do not have to spend so much money for food, girls are freed from family labour and are able to start going to schools.

Suppose then a civil society organization, not a governmental organization, is involved in this experiment, you can tell what difference civil society can make for the neediest in the poorest part of the world. You might then want to think of organizing a civil society group and send it to, say, Sudan, to get engaged in such activities as above.

The Muslim faith has never been a belligerent religion. Quite the opposite is true, I know. But you need be aware that you must prove it. That Muslims help others by using civil society organizations would enlighten people the world-over to really know the true face of the religion.

Whether civil society precedes the democratization of a society can best be understood by looking back at my own country's history. Between 1603 and 1868 there was an era we named Edo. The capital city, Tokyo, was then called Edo, from whence came the name of the period. For a pre-industrialized economy Edo was a disproportionately large city with a population of one million residents. Yet only 290 officials, comprising police officers, fire fighters and judges, sufficed for the large city to be run. Still Edo surprised visiting Westerners without exception with its tidiness, administrative efficiency, and urban beauty. The secret lay in the fact that a vast population of retired people volunteered to run the city affairs. They ranged from community councillors, to attorneys, to judges. The rule of law prevailed and was kept maintained as a result. Also made possible as a consequence was an enrichment of mass culture. Ordinary people enjoyed theatre trips, firework displays, and fostering bonsai without being too worried about future risks of any kind. For a current day academic like me the city of Edo in that era provides powerful evidence that civil society did exist in a pre-modern nation where democracy was absolutely unheard of.

Why was this possible? Historians still debate as to why. One thing I can say for certain is that for the Edoites trust already was amongst the supreme values. Bound by trust, they had good governance of commercial activities and statecraft, which then gave fertile soil for civil society institutions to grow. Fast forward to the 21st Century, and we must still build trust in advance of almost anything. For industrial development, freer trade, democracy, and of course civil society to take root and then flourish, trust must be put in place first and foremost. It is for this reason I should humbly call upon the people in this part of the world to further heighten peer pressure toward certain neighbours.

For the Palestinians, our Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi made a pledge in May last year that the Government of Japan would provide assistance of various kinds, amounting to US 100 million dollars. Recently, on 17 March this year, the Government of Japan decided to extend US 6 million dollar worth of food aid to the region through the UNRWA and the WFP, bringing the US dollar amount we have already implemented or decided to extend to 72 million. All this we are contributing in the hope and expectation that the Hamas-led government would give up violent means to pursue their policy objectives, build trust among themselves first, and then with the Israelis for both parties to eventually live together

more peacefully than now. To the Israelis we must also continue our efforts to convince them of the vital importance of the road map. I, for one, know how hard a task it is for either one of the parties to achieve. In the meantime we will not cease to invest in the equity of goodwill of both parties. So again I should rather encourage you all to continue to support the now fragile peace process. And yet again, they must have trust, not only for the process to regain steam, but also more importantly for the children on both sides to have self-esteem and hope so that they can dream of a better future.

Now, shifting back to Japan to give a few concluding remarks. Hans Tietmeyer, former head of the German Bundesbank, once said something like the following, and I quote it from memory:

*"The German people have a broken, an interrupted, relationship with their own history. They can't parade like others. They can't salute their flag with the same enthusiasm as others. Their only safe symbol is the mark."*

Replace the "German" with the "Japanese", and the "mark" with the "yen", and you can also see why the Japanese have long been shy and reserved in talking of universal values like democracy and human rights. I can assure you that those days are gone. Sixty years have not been a short period of time. Particularly over the last decade and a half, the Japanese have kept encouraging themselves to join forces with others in the pursuit of democracy, human rights, and other universally accepted values. Our diplomacy is much more value driven than before. It is with this renewed confidence that the Japanese Foreign Ministry is inviting teachers from religious schools in some of the Muslim nations in Asia. The idea is to let them familiarize themselves with the fact that age-old traditions and cultures can proceed hand in hand with modern industrialization and political democratization. We wish to be their source of inspiration to understand that.

In China, which struggles to achieve sustainable growth paths, we are still helping the Chinese to modernize their rural educational institutions so that fewer children would be left behind. All this, once again, is important for us. Because good education fosters self-esteem among the populous, and as said before, only with self-esteem can people trust each other and start caring about the less fortunate.

We have also developed rich soils upon which civil society grows. The Japan chapter of Medecins Sans Frontieres or Doctors without Borders is among the most active, with its dedicated members working even now in places like Sudan and Pakistan. A large number of NGOs are engaged in such activities as helping children in the Chernobyl area of Russia, where the after-effects of the reactor explosion still linger, harming the health of the locals. The ageing of the Japanese society has also brought about a pleasant consequence whereby more and more seniors are pursuing their self-fulfilment by getting involved in non-profit activities.

To further empower the Japanese civil society organizations, my colleagues and I are planning to establish a new institution where people can learn to become builders of peace. We are hoping to make it a centre of excellence in the training of future constructors of peace. We will be tapping wells of knowledge everywhere to make it happen.

To conclude, may I once again stress that although Japan may be far from here in geographic terms, the hearts and minds of the Japanese have never been closer to you than they are now. I have emphasized in my brief presentation the importance of a number of things: education, self-esteem, trust among people. They are the ingredients for a good society where people care for each other, civil society organizations can grow.

Let me introduce words of Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle which I found at Oxford University last year:

*"It is more difficult to organize peace than to win war, but the fruit of victory will be soon lost if peace is not well organized."*