

Afghanistan national day

Mutually supportive relationship grows stronger

Sayed M. Amin Fatimie
AMBASSADOR OF AFGHANISTAN

This Aug. 19 marks the 93rd anniversary of Afghanistan's independence as a modern state. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of President Hamid Karzai and the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, to extend my warmest greetings and gratitude to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and to the government and people of this noble nation for their unwavering friendship and partnership.



Afghanistan has a rich and extended history. Long known as a crossroads of cultures, Afghanistan's cultural contributions to the world had a reach far beyond the immediate region. In our

earliest encounters, the Silk Road transported goods and ideas between our two nations. The travel of persons from Afghanistan to Japan, and in reverse, would come much later, but would be marked by gestures of mutual support from the outset. Then, the foundation of institutionalized diplomatic relations in 1930 was formalized, and subsequently missions within the other's respective borders were built within three years. By the late 1930s, Japan had sent experts to assist in the development of Afghan irrigation systems. Over the coming decades, cooperation would take many forms, but relations remained consistently close and warm.

With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's new democracy in 2001, we would once again see a change in the form of our relationship, but the strength of our bonds would be reaffirmed. In the 11

years that have passed, Japan has ranked No. 2 in nations' financial contributions to our peace and development. We are aware that this is no small sacrifice, especially as your nation still faces challenges in addressing the effects of last March's disasters. We are humbled to say that the investments of Japan and the international community have been worthwhile and life-changing. Significant progress has been made across all sectors, with such indicators as an increased life expectancy, now at about 63 years compared to around 45 years in the previous survey; improved survival of mothers and children during childbirth; improved and increased access to education, with more than 8 million enrolled in schools nationwide; an ever-improving environment of empowerment for women, as shown in the 27 percent of all seats in the National Assembly being held by female lawmakers; great economic strides domestically; and an increase worldwide in preventing the ability of international terrorists to disrupt peace. All of the accomplishments deserve celebration and we will forever be grateful to those who helped us achieve so much.

On July 8, roughly 80 nations and international organizations gathered at the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan. This important initiative was built



Friendly ties: Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai meets with Emperor Akihito at the Imperial Palace on July 10 after attending the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan. EMBASSY OF AFGHANISTAN

around the latest stage of the evolution of Afghanistan's relationship with Japan as well as the world in general. H.E. President Karzai, H.E. Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and senior Afghan and international officials endorsed and offered facilitation for the plans to support the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan through the transition period of 2013-2014 and the transformation decade of 2015-2024. Significant to these years will be

the assumption of responsibility of total security by Afghan Security Forces and the reduction of dependence on international aid. The goals are lofty, but by increasing private investment, particularly in our great reserves of natural resources, and through increased regional and international cooperation we are primed to succeed. Japan will play a positive role within this process, and its leadership in rallying international support

has been and will continue to be invaluable. The Afghan government, in turn, remains committed to honoring the investments of Japan and the international community through the happier, healthier and freer lives of its citizens, and the extended betterment of the world as a result.

After thousands of years, our friendship has only begun; Afghans and Japanese will remain forever linked and mutually supportive.

A huge step forward for economic relations between our countries

Hiroiyuki Ishige
CHAIRMAN AND CEO, JAPAN EXTERNAL TRADE ORGANIZATION (JETRO)



I would like to express my sincere congratulations on the 93rd anniversary of the Independence Day of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Taking its role in promoting trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world, this year JETRO has supported the first participation of an Afghan company in Foodex Japan, an international food and beverage exhibition. The company had several lively business talks and this occasion marked a huge step forward for us in fostering cooperation with Afghanistan.

Considering Japan's own experience in postwar reconstruction, I believe expansion of trade will assume a significant role in the economic restoration of Afghanistan as well. Though the country is still facing many challenges toward this, including stable security, vitalization of the private sector and human resource development, I earnestly hope that the people of Afghanistan will work together with the international community to overcome them. I am also hopeful that further activation of the private sector will lead to the expansion of economic relations between our countries. For our part, we at JETRO will also continue devoting ourselves toward this goal.



Gender equality: President Karzai and officials regularly discuss ways to further improve conditions for women with the Afghan Women's Network. EMBASSY OF AFGHANISTAN

Re-empowerment of women in Afghanistan

Parwana Paikan
THIRD SECRETARY, EMBASSY OF AFGHANISTAN

The London Olympics has come to a close. We in Afghanistan feel a great sense of elation that a national hero, Rohullah Nikpai, won his and Afghanistan's second ever Olympic medal at the games, a bronze in men's taekwondo. One of the Olympics' most inspiring stories will forever remain the unprecedented representation of female athletes, as certain nations for the first time ever sent women to compete. Our six athletes also included one of our proud sisters, Tahmina Kohistani, a sprinter. While Kohistani was unable to secure a medal, her participation, determination, and courage were inspiring. This renewed participation of women is indicative of Afghanistan.

Misconceptions hold that Afghanistan is at its core a nation and a people determined to keep women down. Historically and contemporarily this is not true. These opinions are shaped by lack of insight and by projecting the policies of our backward former captors upon the victims.

Afghanistan of old was regionally a progressive nation regarding gender equality. As far back as 1923, our constitution asserted equal rights, and women were given voting rights and other basic rights earlier than contemporaries in nearby states. Women were represented throughout society, with women in the 1970s outnumbering men at Kabul University.

When the Taliban instilled their primitive brand of oppression, women's rights were

among the worst casualties. Women were denied education, the right to work, were confined to the home without a male relative as an escort and were stripped of many other freedoms. In my case, I was more fortunate than others. Raised in a family with a mother who was involved in supporting women, a very cooperative father and four determined sisters, I was able to continue my studies until the Taliban's influence reached our home area, Mazar-i-Sharif, in the north. Even after our ability to attend school in the open was compromised, we continued to study subjects such as English in secret, never allowing our spirits to be crushed.

Once Afghans were liberated through joint domestic and international action, I was able to take up formal education once more, first graduating from university in Kabul and later pursuing higher education in Japan. As of April this year, I was given the distinct honor of being named the first female diplomat at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Tokyo since our nation's re-emergence.

My story, while only a small example, is proof of the determination of Afghan women in the face of hardship and of our nation's sincere dedication to gender equality. This is proven through the rise of women to positions in parliament, to the level of ambassador, governor, mayor and general, as well as in those women who succeed in all realms of everyday life. To echo the sentiments of Ambassador Fatimie, the investments pledged at the Tokyo Conference are truly justified, as the example of women shows.

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on the 93rd Anniversary of

the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan National Day



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