

Afghanistan national day

Long-standing friendship grows closer

Sayed M. Amin Fatimie
AMBASSADOR OF AFGHANISTAN

Today on Afghan National Day, it is my pleasure, on behalf of H.E. President Hamid Karzai, the government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, to convey my deepest respects to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and to the people and government of Japan.

While in a modern sense 2011 marks our 92nd National Day, our nation's history extends thousands of years further. Similarly, while this year also marks our 81st year of official diplomatic relations with Japan, our

first interactions date as far back as the Silk Road era when traded goods and ideas were our first ambassadors. Over time, this linkage of commerce and cultural influence developed into people-to-people contact, deep-rooted friendship and mutual support. Our relations reached even-greater levels of closeness following the 2001 formation of the new democratic government of Afghanistan, as Japan took an active and leading role in support of our development and peace. The No. 2 provider of aid, Japan's \$3.5 billion in assistance since — \$1.67 billion of this from the 2009 pledge of \$5 billion over 5 years — has fostered positive

progress in our political, security, infrastructure, education, health, and agriculture sectors, among others. These selfless contributions deserve our deepest appreciation and will never be forgotten.

Because of our close friendship, the tragedies of March 11 greatly distressed the people of Afghanistan, who view Japanese suffering as the suffering of brothers and sisters. I would like to express my heartfelt condolences, on behalf of all Afghans, to the victims and all who continue to suffer. Considering all Japan has done for our nation, along with our legacy of helping one another, Afghanistan and Afghans considered it our duty to stand together with Japan. Starting only hours after news reached our people, overtures of support began to emerge through financial contributions from the national government and individual officials. Ordinary citizens collected what they could for the drive led by Fatima Gaillani, president of the Afghan Red Crescent Society. Afghan children showed a special solidarity, gathering in support and sending drawings of encouragement. Afghan nationals in Japan, along with embassy officials, in particular reached out to neighbors, collecting donations, bringing furnishings to evacuees from Fu-

kushima in Ibaraki, and delivering funds to Fukushima City. While these contributions were small on a world scale, all Afghans felt honored to help as they could. Through these hardships, our nations' peoples have grown even closer.

In my time in Japan, I have come to know the Japanese as a strong, resilient, and hardworking people. I am certain that the Tohoku region will soon rebuild and strengthen. This nation has proven that it is able to rise from hardship through its past strides in becoming a stable, beautiful nation, and an economic and cultural leader. In Afghanistan's rebuilding and development, we have constantly looked at post-World War II Japan as the ultimate example and role model. Through Japan we have gained the inspiration to replace decades of destruction with progress. To cite a few examples, education is improving with 8 million children in schools — eight times the number 10 years ago; enrollment in higher education is increasing rapidly; our adult literacy rate is better than it was even during the 1970s; we continue to increase the scope and effectiveness of our health sector with over 1,800 active health facilities nationwide and large reductions of infant and under-5 mortality rates, as well as



Friendship: H.E. Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai meets H.I.M. Emperor Akihito in June 2010 at the Imperial Palace.

maternal mortality ratios; women hold a valued place in society and exercise leadership, with 28 percent of parliamentarians and several other key government figures being women; and our freedoms, evident in our democratic elections and our press operating without restrictions or limitations, are an example for the region. Having

overcome so much, we hope now that our successes can serve as inspiration to the people of Tohoku and Japan.

Our nation is truly fortunate to have a strong and deep friendship with Japan. I would like to join in the sentiments of H.E. Prime Minister Naoto Kan, as he said to H.E. President Karzai last June, "I am confident

Working with the Afghan people

Sadako Ogata
PRESIDENT, JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY

I wish to congratulate the Afghan people on the 92nd anniversary of the Independence Day of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Japan established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in 1930 and has enjoyed this good relationship for more than 80 years. This friendship was reaffirmed and strengthened by the warm sympathies and generous support from Afghanistan to Japan during the tragedy of the terrible earthquake and tsunami this March.

While Afghanistan has steadily promoted social and economic development these past years, it faces bigger challenges as 2014, the year of "transition," approaches. Japan has played a leading role in supporting the Afghan efforts for peace-building and reconstruction. I wish to give my assurance that the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan's main development agency, will continue to work with the Afghan people toward achieving true peace and prosperity.



that the relationship between our two nations will endure thousands of years more into the future; throughout this we will further support and inspire one another."



Solidarity: Afghanistan Ambassador Sayed M. Amin Fatimie (third from left) meets a Fukushima evacuee on May 20 in a temporary residence provided by the embassy in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture. EMBASSY OF AFGHANISTAN

Congratulations on the 92nd Anniversary of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan National Day

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