

July, 2009

*The Statement of H.E. Mr. Takeshi Kondo, Ambassador of
Japan, Upon Completion of his Assignment*

As I am ending my mission here, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the leadership and people of the Kingdom of Bahrain for their warm hospitality and support over these past 28 months, which I will never forget and for which I will forever be grateful.

In my career, I have been privileged to serve my country in many ways, as an international trader, a corporate Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a head of a government agency and a Member of Parliament. But it has been the highest honour and privilege of my life to represent my country as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain. The Kingdom of Bahrain was the one country in which I requested to serve, and I will remain thankful to Prime Minister Koizumi and his successors for placing their confidence in me.

Our bilateral relations are special as Bahrain and Japan share common interests and values. The peace, stability, and prosperity of this region are vitally important for our two nations. Over these past two years, our relationship has been further deepened and our friendship has been strengthened significantly. At a governmental level, a Joint Economic Committee was set up, and between the Ministry of Finance of Bahrain and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed for a strategic financial partnership. Furthermore, among the Parliamentarians, we have established bilateral friendship groups in each of the two countries. At a private sector level, a long awaited Bahrain-Japan Friendship Society was officially launched earlier this year.

I am confident that an excellent relationship also exists on a personal level amongst our leaders. Last October, H.H. Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Bahrain made an official visit to Japan. Earlier, H.E. Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Foreign Minister and H.E. Mr. Khalifa Ahmed Al Dhahrani, Chairman of the Council of Representatives were respectively invited to visit Japan by their counterparts.

Likewise, from Japan, the important political leaders including former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, former Secretary General Tsutomu Takebe of the Liberal Democratic Party, and Deputy Ministers of Finance, Foreign Affairs and Defense, have visited this country over the past two years.

The increasing high-level contacts between our two countries reflect the importance of our ties and have allowed us to become not only close friends, but also reliable partners in international forums as well as in commerce. Japan-Bahrain trade increased by more than 20% to US\$1.3 billion last year, confirming Japan's position as the Kingdom's second largest international trading partner. Furthermore, more than a dozen of Japan's largest and most prominent organizations are now regionally headquartered here. I have no doubt that we will work even more closely together in the years to come.

I cannot depart without mentioning my social life in Bahrain. Among many social events and activities, I particularly enjoyed visiting the weekly and annual majlises (held during the Holy Month of Ramadan). It was at these gatherings that I witnessed the convergence of Bahrain's policymakers and businessmen, writers and artists, doctors and teachers, fishermen and veteran divers. I have been impressed and humbled by all I have learned about Bahrain and spirit of the Bahraini people.

I have also been fortunate enough to have met so many young people, whom this Kingdom will entrust with its future. I am very proud of the young Bahrainis going to Japan every year either to participate in the Youth Ship Program or to obtain higher degrees in different specializations. These Bahrainis have set an example of excellence and hard work. Also, I will never forget the intellectual interaction which I enjoyed with the postgraduate students in the classrooms at the Ahlia University, where I was invited to lecture on Japan's economic development every Saturday between March and May of this year.

In addition, I was deeply touched and moved by the warm and affectionate welcome given to me by the young boys and girls at the Alia Centre for Early Intervention, the Down Syndrome Care Center, and the Hope Institute for Special Education. I will never forget their shining smiles.

As I return home to Tokyo, Bahrain will continue to hold a special place in my heart, and I look forward with interest, to where your future leads you. I envisage a Bahrain that succeeds in all its reformist endeavours, thereby becoming even more prosperous, in line with the Economic Vision 2030, which eloquently represents the noblest aspirations for Bahrain's future. I depart this wonderful country with the knowledge that our relationship today is stronger than ever before, and I am proud to have been able to play my part in its development.

Lastly, as my parting words, please let me just say to you all once again "shukran" for the warm hospitality, support, and friendship that was continuously extended to both myself and my wife during our stay here and also for providing me with some of the best experiences of my life. I feel that I have been truly blessed.

Massalama wa elaliqa!.