

Keynote Address by Mr. Nobutaka Machimura, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia,

His Excellency Mr. Ieng Mouly, Chairman of the Governing Council, Cambodian Mine Action Centre,

His Excellency Mr. Sam Sotha, Director-General of the Cambodian Mine Action Centre,

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Government and People of Kingdom of Cambodia, and particularly to CMAC for convening this Phnom Penh International Forum on Demining and Victim Assistance. I feel highly honored to have been invited to speak at the beginning of this very important meeting.

As Foreign Minister and now as Prime Minister, Mr. Keizo Obuchi has dedicated himself to the solution of landmine issues in the belief that these inhumane weapons should be eliminated from the earth. As Minister of Education, a post I held until just recently, I had associated myself with his efforts. Therefore, I particularly welcome this opportunity to participate in this Forum, having just assumed the post of State Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

Yesterday I visited a demining site near Phnom Penh, where I was deeply impressed by the patient and skillful manner in which the deminers conducted their difficult and dangerous work. I renewed my commitment to promoting Japan's efforts in this field.

This International Forum was proposed by His Excellency Mr. Sam Sotha at the Tokyo Conference on Anti-personnel Landmines held in March last year. At that Conference it was decided that "Zero Victims" would be the common objective of the international community, following the example of CMAC which had also made "Zero Victims" the goal of its demining activities. The Tokyo Conference also adopted the "Tokyo Guidelines" which emphasizes the importance of "ownership and partnership." Ownership refers to the key role that mine-affected countries should play in mine clearance and victims assistance activities, while partnership refers to the cooperation that the international community should extend to these mine-affected countries. CMAC is a good example of this "ownership and partnership." CMAC was originally set up under UNTAC and has been gradually transferred to the authority of the Government of Cambodia. The international community has extended its cooperation to the process.

The purpose of this Forum is to share Cambodia's past experiences and most effective practices with other mine-affected countries so that they can learn how to conduct demining activities based on ownership. The Forum also aims at examining ways to promote cooperation and coordination among donor countries, international organizations, and NGOs.

At the Ottawa Conference last December, then Foreign Minister Obuchi announced the "Zero Victims Program," recognizing that anti-personnel landmines are not only a humanitarian problem, but also pose serious obstacles to post-conflict rehabilitation and development. This program is based on the idea that it is essential to take a comprehensive approach which includes an universal and effective ban on anti-personnel landmines as well as mine-clearance and victims assistance activities in order to achieve the zero victims goal.

Permit me now to describe how Japan has implemented this "Zero Victims Program" so far.

Japan became a party to the Ottawa Convention by presenting its instrument of acceptance to the United Nations on 30 September. We will make every effort to effectively implement the Convention. On the other hand, a new treaty is now under consideration by the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to prohibit the import and export of anti-personnel landmines. It is hoped that countries unwilling to join the Ottawa Convention will participate in this treaty. Japan will continue to make further contributions to the start of negotiations on it.

With regard to demining and victims assistance, Japan announced at the Ottawa Conference that it would contribute 10 billion yen, or about 80 million US dollars, over five years. In extending this assistance, Japan will aim in principle at enhancing the capacity of countries whose governments play a key role in their activities based on ownership, in accordance with the Tokyo Guidelines. For example, Japan has contributed 1 million US dollars to assist setting up a Mine Action Center in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has also appropriated 1 million US dollars to support the activities of the Slovenian International Trust Fund. Moreover, it has recently decided to contribute about 2 million US dollars to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund, 9 hundred thousand US dollars to CMAC, and 1 million US dollars to the UNDP project in Mozambique.

Now I would like to explain how Japan intends to cooperate with Cambodia in the context of the zero victims program.

A Japanese mission was sent to Cambodia in June and July this year, in order to explore the possibility of further cooperation with this country. That mission underscored the fact that anti-personnel landmines continue to pose major obstacles to the economic and social reconstruction of a large part of the country, even though CMAC's vigorous activities have been extremely effective. In addition, we also found that the system and facilities for emergency medical care and the rehabilitation of victims must be improved, a task that will require international cooperation. Based on these results, we now have a plan to execute the following support for enhancing the capacity of CMAC, as well as ministries and organizations concerned.

Concerning mine clearance activities, we will focus our cooperation in three areas. First, we will dispatch experts to improve the management of CMAC, in order to strengthen its capacity. Second, we will provide necessary equipment such as bush-cutters, vehicles, and communications equipment in order to enhance the efficiency of CMAC operations. Third, we will assist NGOs which are working closely with CMAC by providing needed materials. In this connection, we are considering the provision of appropriate support for promoting the development, by Japanese NGOs and other private organizations, of mine detectors or mine removal equipment.

In the field of victims assistance, Japan will help to improve the emergency response capacity by strengthening the victim transport medical care systems, with the Ministry of Health acting as key organ. For this purpose, cooperation with major hospitals and health centers in regions where mines pose a particular threat is essential.

With regard to the rehabilitation of victims, Japan will cooperate with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Labor, and Military Veterans to improve its training and managerial capacities in this field. We are also ready to provide training equipment to major rehabilitation centers.

Furthermore, Japan hopes to promote in a more comprehensive manner cooperation with Cambodia in order to help its reconstruction and development including demined fields.

This is what Japan has been trying to do in Cambodia. But we believe that this Cambodian case can be a model for cooperation with other countries under the "Zero Victims Program," and we are prepared to expand our cooperation with other mine-affected countries in the spirit of partnership.

I wish to note here that Japanese civil society is also quite active in the field of landmine-related activities. For instance, one of the Japanese NGOs participating in this Forum has published picture books about landmines and has donated all of the profits from the sales of these books to mine clearance activities. Another NGO is developing a new type of mine detection device to render the demining process safer and more efficient. Networking among NGOs is progressing, and I expect that the upcoming Third Tokyo NGO Conference will contribute to the mobilization of the international community on this issue.

(Conclusion)

Mr. Chairman:

We are being exposed to new threats which will affect our own lives and those of future generations, such as environmental degradation, overpopulation, food shortage, terrorism, international organized crime, drugs, AIDS and so on. In the coming 21st century, protection from these new threats, that is, ensuring "Human Security" will be a major concern of society. Anti-personnel landmines kill indiscriminately. We need, therefore, to work together to strengthen international cooperation to realize the total ban on anti-personnel landmines and achieve the zero victims goal. During my tenure as Minister of Education until quite recently, I naturally focused my attention on children. Considering that one out of five landmine victims is a child under 15 years of age, I feel all the more strongly about the urgent need to redouble our endeavors in this field.

In this connection, I think it is increasingly important that mine-affected countries share their experiences and accumulated know-how, and develop more effective and efficient methods and technology for mine clearance activities. From this point of view, I wish to take this opportunity to suggest that the possibility be explored of setting up a focal point for South-South cooperation in order to promote cooperation among mine-affected countries in a more efficient way.

I would like to conclude my remarks by expressing the hope that this Forum will make an important contribution to the achievement of "Zero Victims" goal.

Thank you very much.

(End)