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Policy Speech by Ms. Yoriko Kawaguchi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan

At the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent, Uzbekistan on August 26, 2004
"Adding a New Dimension: Central Asia plus Japan"

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is truly a pleasure to be here in Tashkent to address you today. Uzbekistan is just my first stop on my visit to Central Asia, and I will soon be visiting Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. I am delighted at this opportunity to see so much of the region and further reinforce the many ties between us.

As you are all very well aware, Japan's links with Central Asia go back over a thousand years. Much of what became civilization in Japan had its origins in the area just west of China, the region which had its center at what we now call Central Asia. It would be a mistake for anyone to think of this region as merely a crossroads between the east and the west. Instead, blessed with oases and pastureland, this region was the place where east and west, and north and south, not only fused but was also generated anew, the cradleland of urban civilization and nomadic civilization. And in the 11th century, Avicenna of Bukhara compiled his Book of Healing, thereby contributing so enormously to Western medical understanding. Moreover, in the 14th century, in Samarkand, capital of the Timurid Empire, magnificent architecture bloomed, and very precise astronomical calculations were conducted by its learned astronomers. In this way, Central Asia, which was the immense hub of civilization for many years in the history of mankind, here in the 21st century, is again in the midst of revitalization and development. I feel that now is the time for Japan to revisit its relationship with Central Asia.

Since the independence of the countries of Central Asia at the end of 1991, the Japanese people have really reawakened to the enormously rich variety of the people and culture of Central Asia, which was barely distinguishable to the outside world before. Then, in 1997 Japan's policy of Silk Road diplomacy towards Central Asia was announced, and Japan has since then focused on building up stronger bilateral relationships concentrated in the three main areas of policy dialogue, economic and resource development assistance, and peace building. At a more grass-roots level, Japanese interest in Central Asia has grown phenomenally since that time, and Japan now has at least seven different civil-society friendship organizations focused on Uzbekistan alone, to give just one example. The past 13 years have thus brought enormous changes in both the nature and scope of our ties and our degree of cultural understanding.

Japan's economic ties to this region have grown more than fivefold in the last 13 years, and Japan continues to place great importance on developing the necessary infrastructure to strengthen Central Asia's economic and social foundations even further. But I must emphasize that Japan is committed to developing more than just infrastructure. We are equally committed to developing the human resources of the region, and Japan has accepted some 2,600 Central Asian researchers and trainees and sent some 600 of our specialists and government-sponsored volunteers to the region. Thus far, Japan has provided some 260 billion yen about 2.4 billion US dollars to Central Asia in support of its basic human needs, its infrastructure, and capacity building.

Economic development, in addition to ensuring the independence of a country, is key in bringing stability to the lives of its citizens. Thus, it is fundamental in nation-building. What is most important in bringing economic development about is the construction of a dynamic economic system rooted in market principles. What is most important in the countries of Central Asia right now is further efforts towards the transition to this type of market economy. Japan intends to continue to support, through a variety of means, these kinds of voluntary efforts of the countries of Central Asia.

With Central Asia's abundant energy resources and its excellent human resources, boasting a literacy rate of over 90%, it is clear that the potential for this region is very great indeed. I believe that as Japan considers various ways in which it can further assist the nations of Central Asia two key areas will be energy and the environment. Central Asia is discovering more and more untapped energy resources. We are now witnessing a rise in energy demand by the countries of Asia, most notably China and India, which naturally raises the issue of how to ensure diversity of supply. Moreover, with the globalization of the markets, the stability of the international energy market has become increasingly critical. Japan sent a "Silk Road Energy Mission" to this area two years ago, but now, even more so than before, the stable supply of energy resources from the Central Asian region is becoming increasingly important. Further formulation of the legal framework in each country of Central Asia is now what is needed in order to create an environment which is conducive to foreign direct investment in the area of resource development. At the same time, the region already faces a number of very severe environmental challenges which make it clear that the environment cannot be neglected on the road to future prosperity. The energy reserves of the region must therefore be developed in an environmentally-friendly manner.

Japan is able to assist with these challenges in a variety of ways, such as helping develop an improved legal system which will encourage foreign investment and promoting cleaner and more environmentally-friendly energy use along with other environmental protection measures. Hidden behind Japan's economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s was a host of extremely serious environmental problems, some of which we are only finally beginning to solve. Japan is already assisting many countries in finding ways to achieve economic goals hand-in-hand with environmental conservation by contributing its experience and knowledge.

Water issues and radioactivity issues are also ones which are close to the heart of the Japanese people because of our own geography and our own history. For example, the people in Japan's Lake Biwa area in particular have become increasingly aware of and concerned with the environmental tragedy of the Aral Sea. Semiparatinsk is also known to the Japanese people and in fact next month there will be a concert given in Hiroshima to foster awareness of Semiparatinsk while raising money for related charities.

In considering the stability and the prosperity of this region, I would like to emphasize the crucial nature of the development of human rights and democratization in Central Asia. Japan has, through its long history, developed its own unique culture while also realizing a democracy which respects the inherent dignity of human beings. It now stands as one of the freest nations in the world. I believe strongly that human rights and democracy can be realized within each country's cultural and historical context, and in this area, too, Japan hopes to be able to contribute its experiences and its knowledge.

The countries of Central Asia are rooted in thousands of years of tradition. Yet it is important to distinguish between what is truly rooted in tradition and what is rooted merely in vested interests

handed down from the past. Reforming these systems requires significant moral and political courage, as Japan discovered when it stopped its practice of paying salaries to its samurai, or when it reformed its system of agricultural land tenure after World War II. As the landowners who lost land holdings as a result of this agricultural reform demonstrated, reforms are in many cases painful. Yet without those reforms, Japan would not have progressed to where it is today.

It goes without saying that there are many changes we have no control over. The sweeping changes to international security as a result of 9/11 are only one example of this, and suddenly Central Asia finds itself in the middle of a dramatically shifted regional strategic environment. I can tell you emphatically that Japan has no selfish objectives towards Central Asia. A country, which does not engage in the use of force and a country with no political, territorial, or other potential sources of conflict with the countries of Central Asia, Japan is a natural partner for Central Asia, and the foundations have already been laid. In reflection of Central Asia's geopolitical importance, Japan has a major interest in securing peace and stability in this region, as it affects the peace and stability of the entire Eurasian continent.

In various regions around the world, the tide has already begun to shift to regional integration, and in East Asia, which has the highest rate of economic growth in the world, we are already witnessing what appear to be the first steps towards economic integration among ASEAN, Japan, China, and Korea.

Thus, while I recognize the challenges confronting Central Asia as it finds itself in the middle of such sweeping strategic environmental changes, it is crucial for the countries of the region, as it was for the countries of ASEAN, to take concrete steps towards intra-regional cooperation. While each country in Central Asia is unquestionably unique with its own particular cultures, languages, and history, the enormous amount shared in common within the region generates enormous potential for cooperative strategies. I cannot imagine that being oriented towards fortifying the region's strengths while respecting individual differences would do anything other than enhance the region's esteem in the eyes of the international community, even as it reinforces each nation's independence.

For example, ASEAN has a long history of regional cooperation, and in order to bring about the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), it is making progress in implementing reductions in tariffs across the board and standardization of customs procedures. APEC, which has developed into the large cooperative framework for this region, is already implementing a scheme known as the APEC Business Travel Card by which card holders are able to travel within the region without visas. Also, the Western Balkans that made up Albania and the former Yugoslavia such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro despite their tragic history of bloody ethnic strife, are now coming taking initiative in moving forward, undertaking efforts such as the securitization of borders and the conclusion of a free trade agreement. This April, Japan held a ministerial conference in Tokyo on peace consolidation, economic development and intra-regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. Although the circumstances particular to the Western Balkans and the countries of Central Asia are vastly different, there are parallels insofar as that by finding solutions to issues in such areas as transport, energy, water, terrorism, drugs, and the environment through intra-regional cooperation, and by a common market possibly emerging for the Central Asian region with some 55 million people, a significant force will arise for the fortifying of the region's economic strength. In the future, the restoration of connections with Afghanistan will be another topic to broach.

The countries of Central Asia are themselves very aware of the importance of intra-regional cooperation, and in many areas of potential cooperation there are already various views that have

been put forth. With this in mind, I have been giving particular attention to what Japan can do to promote both stability and development in this region. I proposed a meeting of the foreign ministers from throughout Central Asia so that I can express my great hopes and expectations for future efforts in the region. I am pleased to tell you that every country will be attending this meeting, which will be held the day after tomorrow in Astana. If the countries of Central Asia come together to achieve their common interests of regional stability and prosperity by working actively for an intra-regional cooperation, Japan would endorse and support such an approach.

A dialogue or cooperative initiative with Japan, taking the form of "Central Asia plus Japan," would have its basis in three principles, namely, respecting diversity, competition and coordination, and open cooperation. I have already spoken about respecting diversity, so let me move on. Under market principles, what is key is for economic entities to be able to compete freely. It is only when any and every place in the region is able to act equally freely that significant growth will become possible for the region as a whole. Disparities within the region cannot help but create a deleterious situation for stability in the Central Asian region as a whole. For that reason, it is important that there be discussions about coordination among the countries of the region. Furthermore, I believe that it will be through a non-exclusionary approach among all the countries of Central Asia that intra-regional cooperation can bear fruit. Japanese cooperation to support Central Asian intra-regional cooperation will also be conducted in an open manner. I would be very pleased if the countries of this region consider a "Central Asia plus Japan" approach-- a new dimension for our cooperation--as one of its options.

As we proceed along these new lines of cooperation, we hope to redouble our commitment to fostering human to human contact above and beyond our material exchange; the momentum we have seen in the last few years in human and cultural exchanges must be extended and enhanced, flowing in both directions between Central Asia and Japan. For that purpose, I am pleased to be able to announce here today that Japan will accept more than one thousand trainees from Central Asian countries during the next three years. We can and should build on the extensive cooperation and mutual respect that have defined our ties.

As for my proposal that the countries of Central Asia work together cooperatively towards a new dialogue, tell me, do you agree with the idea that the whole often has the potential to be much, much greater than the sum of the members? By Central Asia taking on such an intra-regional framework, I believe that stability and prosperity can be attained much faster and more steadily than by each country acting only independently. And a "Central Asia plus Japan "approach is based on the way of thinking. In this way, we can elevate our relationship to new heights, adding an entirely new dimension to our interaction. In the same way that in history the peoples of Central Asia created a great civilization on the basis of cooperation and coordination of "oasis-centered civilization" and "grassland-centered civilization," I believe that through intra-regional cooperation, tremendous development for this region can be brought forth. I am firmly convinced that such cooperation can be realized and great development can be achieved in the future.

Thank you for your kind attention.