

Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Masato Takaoka  
at the reception to celebrate His Majesty Emperor's Birthday  
at the Embassy of Japan in Baghdad on 20 November, 2012

His Excellency Mr. Naseer Al-Ani,  
The Honourable Members of the Parliament,  
The Honourable Ministers,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Friends and colleagues,

I like to thank you all for coming here today to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor.

I am personally honoured to host this reception just four weeks after my arrival here in Baghdad as Ambassador.

Let me say a few words about the bilateral relationship between Japan and Iraq.

First, our two countries have much in common. In football, Japan and Iraq compete in the Asia Group to qualify for the World Cup. Iraq is a very formidable team for Japan as Zico, the Iraqi head coach, managed the Samurai Japan until recently. Sports aside, we have long national histories with rich cultures though I admit that the Japanese history of over 1500 years may appear modest compared to the Mesopotamia civilisation. Both of us are serious and hard working peoples. Importantly, we went through the tragedies of war, from which Japan rebuilt the nation some decades ago, and from which the earnest reconstruction effort is currently underway in Iraq.

Secondly, Japan has been working closely with Iraq over the recent years in its reconstruction process. The cooperation of the Japan Self-Defense Forces in Samawa until a few years ago is well known. This year with the signing of the exchange of notes concerning new four ODA loan projects, Japan's assistance to Iraq now totals over 5 billion dollars, which goes beyond the pledge at

the Madrid Iraq Reconstruction Conference in 2003. This is a good demonstration of Japan as the country that keeps its word. It is not only in monetary terms that we cooperate with Iraq. Through training and technical assistance, Japan supports Iraq in its institutional building and human resource development. I should also mention other constructive engagements, such as the signing of the Investment Agreement between the two countries, and the launching of the Joint Economic Ministerial Committee on the occasion of Foreign Minister Zebari's visit to Tokyo this May. We focus on improving relevant business environment to promote economic and commercial relationship.

Thirdly, I cannot overemphasize the importance of the role of the private sector and people-to-people contact between Japan and Iraq. The Japanese business is increasingly interested in Iraq, and there are more visitors from Japan to Iraq. At the Baghdad International Fair a couple of weeks ago, we received a large delegation from Japan, and some twenty companies and organizations participated in the Japan Pavilion. My Embassy organized a Japan Day cultural festival under the name of "Experience Japan," which attracted an incredibly huge crowd of people in Baghdad. I now proudly report to you that, thanks to the Grendizer, the extremely popular Japanese anime in Iraq, the Japan Pavilion was awarded the first prize at the closing of the fair.

Altogether, the relationship is on the right track. As Iraq marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a new nation next year, Japan will continue to further promote its partnership and friendship.

Thank you very much.