

For the smiles of the people of Iraq

Masahisa Sato, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan

A thousand emotions thronged on my heart because I could step again on the Iraqi soil which associates with many memories.

In 2004, I spent six months in Samawah, and I can never forget those days for the rest of my life. It was to assist the people of Iraq who were struggling with retrieving normal daily lives after the Iraq War, as the commander of the Japanese Iraq



Reconstruction and Support Group, representing the people of Japan. We worked almost without sleeping on projects such as water supply and construction of a bridge. Sometimes it was physically tough, however, I remember that the fatigue turned into bliss within me in a blink of an eye when I saw the people delighted to see the results. I also remember that I was convinced that Iraq would rise up again when I saw the people working on the reconstruction with their strong minds. I don't live a single day without thinking about Iraq still now.

Having said that, I'm saddened that Iraq has faced various challenges. Precious lives were lost and many were forced to leave their familiar places by the expansion of the influence of ISIL. The progress towards reconstruction had no choice but to stagnate. However, the people of Iraq is about to overcome the national crises again now. This is because the people of Iraq, who support the bases of their own eternal history and rich culture with pride, united beyond their religious order and race. On the completion of the visit to Iraq, I was convinced again that Iraq has a great hope. The emotion is identical to that I felt in Samawah.

Japan took steps forward together with Iraq as a sincere friend and a running partner whenever Iraq had difficult times. We stayed beside the people of Iraq to the maximum extent, extending truly necessary supports ranging from humanitarian aid to infrastructure development. The total amount of Japan's support to Iraq exceeds 15 billion US Dollars including the debt relief. As a citizen of such a country, I wish the people of Iraq would overcome the sectarian and racial differences with the determination for the reconstruction and building of your

nation. The most important purpose of my visit of this time was to convey this message to the leaders and the people of Iraq. Iraq is an extremely important country for the stability of the region more than the people of Iraq yourself are aware of.

Iraq will address the challenges to overcome in order to achieve the better future such as the reconciliation of the people and the advancement of economic and financial reform. Japan will continue its support as a sincere friend and a running partner as long as the people of Iraq have a strong will to rise up on their own. We are also looking forward to enhancing the wide range of exchanges, taking the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations in 2019 as a turning point.

(Al-Sabah on 3rd December 2017)