

Key Points of Presentation by Dr. Daisaku Higashi at “Peace Building Seminar” hosted by Japan Embassy in Baghdad and Baghdad University on 18 February 2019

(The Slides of Presentation by Dr. Daisaku Hiagshi for the seminar can be seen in the link here.)

Dr. Daisaku Higashi, professor at Sophia University in Tokyo and one of the leading scholars in the field of peace-building, appreciated both Japan Embassy in Baghdad and Baghdad University which co-hosted this memorial event for 80 years’ anniversary of Iraq and Japan diplomatic relation.

Dr. Daisaku Higashi has been conducting academic research on peace building or peace process of Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria, East Timor, and Iraq in the last decades. He also worked for UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) as a team leader for reconciliation and reintegration in 2009–2010, as well as Minister-Counsellor in Japan mission to the UN in charge of mediation and peacebuilding matters in 2012–2014.

In 2015, he published his English book, “Challenges of Constructing Legitimacy in Peacebuilding: Afghanistan, Iraq, Sierra Leon and East Timor” (Routledge); in his book, he emphasizes four key factors in creating legitimate governments in post-conflict setting where people comply with the rules of the governments in a voluntary mode. These are: 1) role of credible third parties (UN has comparative advantage on this credibility), 2) inclusiveness, 3) resource distribution, 4) coercive authorities such as police and military.

He especially emphasized the importance of inclusivity in creating legitimate governments and sustainable peace in the long run. Then, he explained that his policy recommendation about supporting Afghan reconciliation was adopted by the Japanese government in the year of 2009, after he explained the recommendations to top policy makers in both Japan and USA. Then, he worked for UNAMA to establish new mechanism of reconciliation with the Taliban, including establishing High Peace Council and Reconciliation Trust Fund in 2010

Since then, it has been very challenging for the Afghan government ant the Taliban to have sustainable peace talks; however, USA and the Taliban started the dialogue and reached to a mutual understanding that USA would like to withdraw US forces from

Afghanistan in the future and the Taliban will not allow Al-Qaida or ISIS to be regrouped in Afghanistan in 2019. This process demonstrated that the challenges of inclusivity continue to be a key issue in Afghanistan, Dr. Higashi insisted.

Then, Dr. Higashi presented his current research about South Sudan which entered the civil war in the end of 2013, after the inclusive political process was collapsed. He also introduced the case of East Timor where two rival leaders achieved political reconciliations and sustainable peace.

Then, he shared his research on Syrian peace process; in Syria, peace negotiation between the government and oppositions (so called moderate oppositions) has been very challenging; at the same time, it may have a risk of relapse if the government only focus on military victory, according to the claim by former UN Special Envoy for Syria.

Finally, Dr. Higashi explained his analysis about Iraq peacebuilding. Reflecting his research about peacebuilding in the different parts of the world, he emphasized that this is a moment for Iraqi people and politicians to overcome sectarian division and to be united in creating effective governance and security. Dr. Higashi mentioned that there seem to be hope in Iraq as Iraqi people were united to fight against the organization from 2014 to 2017, and Iraqi people and political leadership at least accepted the results of national election in 2018 and complied with it. He argued that there might be three priority for current Iraqi peacebuilding, 1) advancing national reconciliation and continuous political dialogues by different political parties, 2) tackling with corruption with zero-tolerance principle, 3) advancing security sector reform that would create “policy and army serving for every Iraqi” , learning lessons of creations of Japanese police and military in the process of its modernization.

Finally, Dr. Higashi concluded that Japan can play a role as “global facilitator” , by supporting the process of dialogue with different political, ethnic, and tribe groups in different parts of the world. He argued that Japan embassy in Baghdad can play some roles in advancing dialogue by different Iraqi groups for peace and effective governance. He also argued that there is a big potential for the collaboration between Baghdad University and Sophia University, as both universities can work together to seek for good approaches in establishing sustainable peace, not only in Iraq but also in the middle east region.

