

Speech by Ambassador Futoshi Matsumoto on the occasion of a reception
celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Japan Self-Defense
Forces

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF). I am very glad to be able to host such a reception for the first time since 2019.

The Government of Japan appointed a new defense attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Masaki UMETANI to our Embassy back in September last year. We had originally planned to introduce him at the Japan Self Defense Forces Day last October, but unfortunately due to the situation in Gaza, we had to cancel it. So, I am truly happy to hold the ceremony at last. Although Colonel Masaki is based in Amman, Jordan, I am expecting him to come to Iraq more frequently and promote bilateral defense cooperation with Iraq.

Let me remind you today that this year marks not only the 70th anniversary of the establishment of JSDF but also the 20th anniversary since the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force was deployed in the city of Samawah in early 2004 to support reconstruction of Iraq. By the way, I can now share with you a small secret that I myself was deeply involved in selection of Samawah at that time in cooperation with local Iraqi tribal leaders such as late Sheikh Sami Azara Al Ma'ajoun and other Iraqis.

Together with our forces, we provided to the people of Samawah a broad range of assistances, including conducting medical training for the local hospitals, constructing water purification facility, rehabilitating public infrastructure such as roads, schools, medical clinics and sports stadium and power station, as well as creating opportunities of employment and supporting capacity building of the local authorities. When I visited Samawah in March this year, the people in Samawah still kept a very good memory of the contributions made by Japan. No wonder about their good memory. In fact, many infrastructures such as bridges, schools and a hospital that we built then are still there, functioning perfectly until today for the sake of the local people. This is truly Japanese original (yabani asli) as Iraqis say about Japan.

Having said that, I believe that there remains much room to develop closer relations in the field of defense between Japan and Iraq, building upon our common

experiences in Samawah. I sincerely hope that the cooperation and human-to-human exchanges between the Japan Self-Defense Forces and the Iraqi counterparts will be revitalized with the help of our Lt. Colonel.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to highly commend the tremendous efforts of the Iraqi Government led by PM Sudani in realizing peace and stability. Amongst all, let me applaud sound development of all security organizations, particularly Iraqi Army as one of the foremost achievements of Iraqi government, bearing in mind a fact that Japan has likewise succeeded in establishing professional Self-Defense Forces in the post WWII period.

Japan, as a true friend of Iraq has been always supporting Iraqis to build themselves peaceful and prosperous society. Building on the long-lasting cordial relationship, let me promise you that Japan is ready to further contribute to stability and sustainable development of Iraq in various fields, including in the field of defence and security. Again, I welcome you all and thank you for being with us today. Please enjoy the rest of the evening.

I thank you for your kind attention.