

Speech of His Excellency Mr. KANO Takehiro
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO
at his Welcome Reception
Thursday 8 February 2024

Excellencies, Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good day to you all.

It's a great pleasure and honor for me to say a few words of thanks at my arrival reception.

UNESCO is a well-known and popular international organization in Japan. Japan joined UNESCO in 1951, before regaining its independence that year, and five years before joining the UN.

Many Japanese then welcomed the spirit of UNESCO's Constitution, adopted immediately after the end of the Second World War, embodied in a famous passage:

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed."

It was a message of hope for many Japanese who were working on post-war reconstruction and reintegration into the international community.

My own direct past experience with UNESCO is limited. In 2007, when I was in charge of development assistance in Tokyo, with Millennium Development Goals being my main portfolio, I had the opportunity to attend the meetings organized by UNESCO on Education for All, one of the priority agenda for then Director General

Koichiro Matsuura, at UNESCO Headquarters and in Africa. That is my only connection with UNESCO, so far.

However, having talks with senior officials of UNESCO as well as fellow ambassadors in the last couple of weeks, I come to find that my experiences in other multilateral areas may help me offer added value to the UNESCO community.

In the early 2010s, I was involved in the negotiations on climate change during the time of the transition from Kyoto Protocol to Paris agreement.

In mid 2010s, I was handling International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, and working closely with colleagues there on such issues as nuclear safeguards, nuclear safety and security, as well as peaceful uses of nuclear energy. I recognize some similarity between IAEA and UNESCO in terms of governing structure, with the Secretariat, the General Conference and the Executive Board or the Board of Governors being the key pillars of both organizations.

Most recently, I was in charge of international peace cooperation last year, consulting closely with senior UN officials in NY on outstanding issues related to PKO and visiting operational sites in Middle East and Africa.

My other experiences of working with Southeast and South Asian countries as well as the United States on bilateral relations may also help.

Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nearly 80 years have passed since the adoption of the Constitution of UNESCO, and unfortunately, various conflicts have emerged across Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The free and open international order based on the rule of law, which was expected to be established after the end of the Cold War, has greatly

deteriorated amid opposition to globalization and historical conflicts rooted in ethnic and religious differences.

As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in his policy paper prepared for the Summit of the Future, “the post-Cold War period is over.”

In times like these, we need to redouble our diplomatic efforts to rebuild collaboration among the nations, reinvigorating the spirit of the United Nations Charter and the UNESCO Constitution.

In this context, I believe that the expectations for UNESCO’s role are greater than ever. The return of the United States to UNESCO last year, which we welcome, is a reflection of such expectations. UNESCO is an international organization whose purpose is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, and culture. It is a clear mandate of UNESCO, enshrined in its Constitution.

With that in mind, Japan has consistently supported UNESCO in various ways, through concrete projects as well as general governance, and will continue to do so. The most recent project is the one I have just signed with Madame Director General Audrey Azoulay yesterday for implementation, namely “Support for Ukraine in culture and education through UNESCO”, financed by our latest supplementary budget contribution.

In these difficult and turbulent times, we still have good reason to believe that UNESCO can and must do something to make a difference.

In the field of culture, UNESCO has a long history of preserving cultural heritage in the face of various risks of conflict or natural disaster.

In November last year, before I arrived in Paris, the 4th Intergovernmental Conference for the safeguarding and the development of Angkor was held at UNESCO. I was in charge of

Southeast Asia 30 years ago, and I personally visited Angkor in 1995. It was just after launching of UNESCO's program as part of Cambodia's international post-conflict reconstruction. I was impressed and proud to see, with my own eyes, the plaque showing the Japan-UNESCO partnership for the Angkor program.

Another of the most recent cases of partnership is that of the Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi in Uganda, which was a success because it was removed from the list of World Heritage in Danger.

Education is, as I said, my entry point for UNESCO and remains the key sector of its activities, which include improving access to primary education in developing countries, promoting education for sustainable development and encouraging regional and global higher education networks.

Last but not least, UNESCO can make an enormous contribution to meeting the global challenges we face today, such as climate change, reducing the risk of natural disasters, or setting standards in artificial intelligence or neuroscience, thanks to its unique role in the scientific field.

So I think there's a lot we can and must do together at UNESCO, within the framework of its mandate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I'd like to thank you once again for coming here today.

Thank you very much.

(End)