
Japan and Peacebuilding: a Glimpse of a Silent Revolution

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by: Kalana Senaratne Japan has risen amazingly from the ashes of the Second World War, with renewed vigour and vitality. Devastated as it were from the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the rest of the world would have expected it to be smarting from rancour, bent on taking revenge from those who inflicted such devastation. Not so. On the contrary, it has risen to be the principal actor in the realm of peacebuilding and fostering peace around the world. Indeed, the magnitude of its work makes one pity its solitude; for those who, at the end of WWII, assumed for themselves the responsibility of promoting peace are currently engaged in doing exactly the opposite.

The Constitution and Political Will The people of Japan, after long years of isolation from the rest of the world, woke up within the first half of the 20th century to the brutality and annihilation caused by the atomic bombings. A Constitution it did adopt in 1947, but one imposed by a conquering power. Yet, it was in a sense, a revolution of sorts. The unprecedented and unique Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which renounces war as well as the maintenance of armed forces (Art. 9.1 states “… the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation…’, and 9.2 states: “In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the State will not be recognized.’), has gone 60 years without amendment, in a world of constant tension and constitutional amendment. Such constitutional provisions which help promote peace (in ways directly inconceivable) are backed by sincere and genuine political will towards the cause of peace. To assist States without favour or discrimination, with funds, finances, and other assistance in kind, proves genuineness of Japan, beyond doubt. Way back as in 1988, the then Japanese Prime Minister Takeshita affirmed in London that Japan will pursue “cooperation for peace’; as a new approach towards enhancing her contribution to the maintenance and reinforcement of international peace. Recently, this message was echoed in the 2008 Policy Speech delivered by the former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda (who stepped down in September), in which he assured that Japan will continue to “play a responsible role in the international community as a Peace Fostering Nation which contributes to peace and development in the world’. At the 2008 G8 Summit (in Hokkaido), Japan set peacebuilding as a primary area which needs greater G8 cooperation – a position which received overwhelming support by the rest of the G8. Japan was also elected to chair the UN Peacebuilding Commission in June 2007 (of which Sri Lanka was also a Member). Hence, Japan’s role and intention is unambiguous and clearly mapped out. Contributing to achieving sustainable peace and development is her goal.

Institutional and Legal Framework The institutional and legal framework which complements the policy framework of the Government in peacebuilding is also an impressive feature in Japan. There is a special International Peace Cooperation Headquarters established within the Japanese Cabinet Office, the role of which is to administer Japan’s international peace cooperation and contribution in kind. The Prime Minister himself acts as the Chief of the Headquarters. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan further complements the work, especially through its International Peace Cooperation Division. It also conducts an Annual Pilot Program for Human Resource Development in Asia for Peacebuilding; a program which was initiated in 2007. There is, in addition to these, an international peace cooperation corps, selected from volunteers or dispatched from concerned administrative organs. In a country where the notion of “duty’ runs high, all this is not a surprise. The legal framework, especially designed for peacekeeping and peace cooperation work, is also praiseworthy. There is a special international peace cooperation law, backed by other important legislative enactments concerning an anti-terrorism special measures law, and an Iraq special measures law. The International Peace Cooperation Law (aka PKO Law) of 1992 establishes the fundamental principles and pre-requisites on which Japan’s peacekeeping assistance rest: i.e. the existence of a cease-fire agreement (Art. 3), consent of the host countries and the parties to the armed conflict (Arts. 3 and 6), impartiality (Art. 3), withdrawal, in case the above are not satisfied (Art. 8) and use of weapons being limited to the minimum necessary to protect personnel’s lives or persons (Arts. 23-24). No interventionist approach here. Japan tries to ensure at all times that its Self Defense Forces will not be involved in armed conflict. Admirable, indeed. And even when it got involved in Iraq in 2003, such involvement was based firmly on the Special Measures Law for Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq Law of 2003 – the main focus of which was to contribute Japan’s assistance in humanitarian and reconstruction activities as well as logistical support. However close an ally it may be, Japan did not engage itself in the armed operations conducted by the US and UK. Praiseworthy, indeed.

Peacekeeping and Assistance in Kind Japan is the second largest contributor to the UN budget. Also, the UN receives a major boost to its peacekeeping activity due to the active participation of Japan. Her assistance comes in various forms, such as the dispatch of Self Defense Forces (SDF) for UN peacekeeping missions and police personnel and in particular, civilians, in non-UN international peace operations (eg. Mindanao and the Solomon Islands). Financial cooperation and assistance also figures prominently. Cooperation through Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) concerning, in particular, humanitarian and reconstruction assistance – along with non-ODA cooperation, which includes assistance to peacekeeping operation training centres (eg. in Africa and Malaysia) and to the police forces of certain States. Japan has undertaken, or assisted in, a number of peace cooperation and peacekeeping activities, since 1992 - especially in the UN Peacekeeping operations in Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, Rwanda, Golan Heights, Bosnia and Herzegovina, East Timor, Afghanistan and Kosovo. In assisting so, SDF personnel and civilians have been dispatched to these missions to carry out various functions such as electoral observation and monitoring, engineering, civilian policing, and assistance in refugee and displaced persons relief work. In making contributions in kind, Japan has provided invaluable assistance by providing medicines and other essential equipments for disarmed soldiers and families in Cambodia, Mozambique, Rwandan refugees, Golan Heights, Kosovo refugees, East Timor, afflicted persons in Afghanistan and Afghan refugees, Iraqi refugees as well as Sudanese refugees. In addition to the above, the Maritime

and Air Defense Forces of Japan provide help in countries such as Cambodia, Mozambique, Indonesia and East Timor. The underlying goal in all this has been to ensure sustainable development which will promote sustainable peace. Perhaps, there is no better teacher specialized in teaching the 'peace-development' inter-linkage, than Japan. Japan's assistance to Sri Lanka Japan has been a firm friend of Sri Lanka for a long time. As a Co-Chair of the Sri Lankan peace process, it has always supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. The Japanese Parliamentary delegation which visited Sri Lanka recently, in a statement, expressed its confidence in the Government concerning the resolution of the conflict. Being one of the largest donors for Sri Lanka, she continues to assist the Government and the people of Sri Lanka. Most recently, the Government of Japan extended a further sum of US \$ 1.6 million for de-mining activity, which will help accelerate the de-mining process in the conflict affected areas. It has also been reported that Japan has contributed over US\$ 15 million for nine mine-clearing activities in Sri Lanka, as well as for the creation of a 'De-mining Unit', in the Ministry of Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction since 2003, under its 'Grant Assistance to Grassroots Human Security Projects' programme. Sri Lanka, whilst appreciating Japan's assistance to help heal the wounds inflicted by the brutal terrorist conflict in Sri Lanka, has appreciated the assistance it lends to other countries. At the ongoing 9th sessions of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Sri Lanka warmly welcomed the assistance granted by Japan to Cambodia, in the areas of technical assistance and cooperation with regard to Cambodia's human rights mechanisms. Conclusion In a world of fluctuating loyalties, Japan remains loyal to the cause of sustainable peace and development. In a global society, where the high and mighty, are now found to be vacillating as to whether their loyalties lay here or there and ending up mired in trifling and puerile situations in which they sometimes do not belong anywhere, Japan's firm resolve to peacebuilding is refreshing. The emergence of Asia, as Kishore Mahbhubani argues, is not characterized by the desire to dominate the world. Its return to a status of being a powerful region is a return to its norm. As the world witnesses this gradual return of Asia to its rightful place, it is inspiring to find Japan at the pinnacle of peacebuilding. The world has high expectations from Japan. Herein lies the challenge, for Japan will have to maintain its independence, impartiality and neutrality, as a peace fostering nation in the future. Especially so, in the midst of her close ties with the US, which are viewed by some with much suspicion, skepticism and anger. This is inevitable – for the acrimony the US has generated for itself by its dubious trust on the world stage is dizzying, to say the least. But Japan has never been doubted or found wanting in sincerity and honesty, and in commitment, in the realm of post-WWII peacebuilding. Even though she might feel at times that her message of peace is but a lone voice in the middle of a vast ocean, Japan should ensure that its message is felt more at great depth and great distance. For this is a silent revolution – those who know will know, those who have benefited will continue to benefit, and those awaiting assistance can have hope of it, in abundance; almost as if Japan understands, that the world is anxious, impatient, difficult to appease, always wanting more! Kalana Senaratne studied at St Thomas' College Mt Lavinia, Sri Lanka. He holds LL.B. and LL.M. degrees from the University of London. Soon after completing his postgraduate studies at University College London (UCL) in 2006, he worked at the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process(SCOPP).He was also a research assistant to Judge C.G. Weeramantry, from 2003 to 2005.