

### **H.E. Dr. Rafik ABDESSALEM, Tunisia's FM pays an official visit to Japan (24-27 June 2012)**

Upon the invitation by H.E. Mr. Koichiro GEMBA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, H.E. Dr. Rafik ABDESSALEM, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia, paid an official visit to Japan from 24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> of June, 2012.

During his visit, he had several meetings with Japanese officials to explore ways and means to strengthen Tunisian-Japanese relations and cooperation. All these meetings were attended by Tunisia's Ambassador to Japan Elyes Kasri and Japan's Ambassador to Tunisia Toshiyuki Taga.

Dr. Abdessalam conferred, in particular, with Mr. Osamu Fujimura, Japanese government's Chief Cabinet Secretary, who expressed Japan's gratitude and consideration to Tunisia for its solidarity following the disaster that hit Japan in March 2011.

Mr. Fujimura also welcomed "the progress of the democratic transition process" in Tunisia, reaffirming Japan's support to these political reforms and its willingness to back up the new government's efforts to meet the economic and social demands, mainly in the field of employment and the fight against regional disparities and strengthening infrastructure.

The meeting was also an occasion to exchange views on international and regional issues of mutual interest, in particular the furtherance of the Maghreb construction and Tunisia's active contribution to the success of the fifth session of the TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) to be held in Japan in June 2013.

The Tunisian Foreign Minister also conferred with Japan's House of Representatives Speaker Takahiro Yokomichi and Vice-President of the Chamber of Councillors Hidehisa Otsuji. On this occasion, focus was placed on the imperative to develop parliamentary diplomacy and to strengthen relations in this field through exchanging visits and expertise, in addition to multiplying the channels of dialogue and consultation.



On June 26, Dr. Abdessalem had a meeting with Mr. Koichiro Gemba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan. Prior to the meeting, a signing ceremony was held for the "Joint Statement between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Japan and of the Republic of Tunisia", which sets out the content and approaches to future bilateral cooperation in various sectors of politics, the economy and economic cooperation, and on regional affairs and cooperation in the international arena.

During the meeting, Minister Gemba expressed his gratitude for the support Japan received from Tunisia at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake. He praised Tunisia's efforts toward democratization, and expressed the hope that the democratization process will move ahead smoothly, including the formulation of a constitution and a subsequent election. Minister Gemba also expressed Japan's support for Tunisia's economic and social reforms.

The meeting was an excellent opportunity to have an exchange about ways and means to further enhance bilateral relations in all fields of common interest, mainly in solar energy, investment, tourism, research and technology. Minister Gemba expressed Japan's intention to extend a new Yen loan for the "Rural Cities Water Environment Improvement Project", which aims to contribute to addressing regional disparities and creating employment in Tunisia.

The two ministers confirmed that they will cooperate to make the Borj Cedria Science and Technology Park, which Japan is supporting, as a hub for exchanges in the field of science and technology for Tunisia and other African countries as well, and shared the view that they will further promote triangular cooperation with Middle Eastern and African countries.

The two ministers exchanged views on the international and regional issues of mutual interest, including in particular the furtherance of the Maghreb construction, the situation in Syria and Tunisia's active contribution to the success of the third Japan-Arab Economic Forum (Tokyo, December 2012) and the fifth session of the TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) (Yokohama, June 2013).



Dr. Abdesslem met Mr. Hirofumi Hirano, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and discussed means to further strengthen the cooperation between the two countries in the fields of Higher Education Science and Technology.

He also met with Mr. Mitsuyoshi Yanagisawa, Senior Vice-Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, and discussed the possibilities of promoting economic cooperation between Tunisia and Japan and attracting more Japanese companies to invest in Tunisia.

Meeting with the Chairman of JICA, Tunisia's Foreign Minister lauded the Agency's support to Tunisia, particularly by means of loans at preferential interest rates, contribution to the water-management and back-up to economic stability.



Besides, Mr. Abdessalem had talks with the Japanese International Cooperation Bank (JBIC) on the granting of Samurai loans and with the Chairman of the Kaidanren which turned on incentives to Japanese investments in Tunisia and support to the country's employment and development policies.



Mr. Abdessalem met with a group of parliamentarians representing both the Democratic Party of Japan and the Liberal Democratic Party. He also gave a press conference at The "Japan National Press Club" about the situation in Tunisia and in the region.



A reception was organized in honor of Minister Abdessalem by the Ambassador of Tunisia, and attended by Mr. Ryuji Yamane, Parliamentary Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, and several parliamentarians, Japanese personalities representing the Government, business community, universities and journalists, and the African and Arab Ambassadors to Japan. A meeting with the Tunisian community in Japan and a meeting with the President and senior staff of University of Tsukuba were also organized.



The Japan Times



<http://www.tap.info.tn/en/en/politics/16093-fm-meets-several-japanese-senior-officials.html>

[http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2012/6/0622\\_01.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2012/6/0622_01.html)

[http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2012/6/0626\\_01.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2012/6/0626_01.html)

[http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/tunisia/meeting1206\\_ccs.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/tunisia/meeting1206_ccs.html)

[http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/24/6/pdfs/0626\\_01\\_02.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/24/6/pdfs/0626_01_02.pdf)