

## Speech by Mr. Shigeyuki Ataka

Honourable Mr. Toshikazu Isomura, Consul General of Japan, Madam Keiko Isomura, Mr. Kazuo Tsukada, Deputy Consul General, Mr. Atsushi Murata, Consul, Ms. Yoko Watanabe, respected ladies and gentlemen.

Assalam-o-Alaikum.

First, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Isomura to hold today's reception for me. It is indeed a great honour for me.

Whenever I recall my life, I feel Allah has been always very kind to me and I thank Allah from the bottom of my heart. I have now been honoured by the heads of two countries dearest to me with their awards.

In 2012 I was awarded the "Pride of Performance" by President Asif Ali Zardari in Islamabad and this year was given an award "The Order of the Sacred Treasure, Silver Rays" by Japan's Emperor Akihito in Tokyo.

As you know, I am not one to talk much about myself, but today kindly allow me to do so on this occasion although it might be too boring and lengthy for you.

I came to Pakistan in 1977 during Zulfqar Ali Bhutto's regime. This was not to last, because after a few weeks General Zia-ul Haq came. At the time, I was studying for an MA in Political Sciences, at the University of Karachi. At that time Dr. Pirzada Qasim was the Foreign Students' Adviser and Mr. Saleem Mughal was my class fellow. Just before completing my MA in 1979, I joined Japan Cultural Centre of the Consulate General of Japan. I worked there till 2005 as an Adviser to Consul General after which I joined Hamdard University. Now I am working for the Friends of Burns Centre.

When I first came to Pakistan, my initial plan was to stay here for one year. As soon as I started living here I was impressed and moved by Pakistani people's hospitality and warm hearts. That is the real reason why instead of one year, I have now been living here for more than 40 years.

Through my career in Pakistan I have always had a firm belief whenever I have planned how to promote the friendship between Pakistan and Japan. This belief is that cultural ties are the strongest ties which bind two countries. Because it is the tie from one heart to another heart.

I have initiated so many programmes. Some of the events I started while I was at the Consulate are still being held annually. These include the Exhibition of Japanese Calendars which started in 1981 and the Urdu Haiku Mushaira which has been ongoing since 1983. Both events are now held annually all over Pakistan.

Whenever, I planned these events I tried to avoid one dimensional exchange. I always tried to find possibilities of cross culture exchanges between Pakistan and Japan.

For instance, when a Japanese pianist was residing here, I had events which created a fusion between the piano and Pakistani classical and folk instruments like sitar, bansri and banjo.

When the world famous Japanese Jazz Quintet called the Hino Terumasa Quintet came, I requested the then top superstar group "Junoon" to have a joint session with them. This resulted

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in the brilliant highs that only people at the top of their craft can achieve and proved that there are no boundaries in arts.

Likewise, when Kondo Fusanosuke visited Karachi, I arranged a collaboration between Fusa the Place and another superstar “Junaid Jamshed”. That day we had audience of more than 3000.

In addition to this, I have also taught Japanese language at the Japanese Language Course since 1990. While I was in the Consulate I taught without honorarium. However, nowadays there is no student in the class I used to teach, the advanced class, so I only am teaching Japanese privately at home. Among all who I have taught, Ilyas sensei is one of my best students.

After leaving Japanese Consulate some other highlights have been organizing the “Solidarity Walk” in 2011 for the victims of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and organizing the “International Symposium on Photojournalism” in 2008 and “1<sup>st</sup> Convention of South Asia Photojournalists Association” in 2012. Ms. Shazia Marri helped us a lot in 2008. While I was in the Consulate I realized the social status of the press photographers in Pakistan was too low and proper social recognition needed to be given to them.

I believe developing networking and close contact among photojournalists in this region will surely help minimize their common problems and promote democracy in their suitable ways which will ultimately help promote peace in this region.

Sometimes, what goes around comes around. Whenever Japanese students came to study Urdu at the University of Karachi, they used to come to my house to spend their weekends and holidays. When we went back to Japan this time, these students kindly gathered to celebrate me being honoured. My wife and I were so much touched and moved.

As I mentioned before to promote friendship and understanding between Pakistan and Japan to strengthen cultural ties is vital. That was the reason I established the Pakistan-Japan Cultural Association in 2002. This Association should be on a civilian level and independent while at the same time always enjoy cordial and close relations with the Japanese Embassy or Consulate.

I could go on and on, but what I want to say here is that I have never initiated or done these events and programs for any personal gain or reward. I have done these because Pakistan and Japan both countries are so dear to me. Japan is the country where I was given a life and grew up and Pakistan is the country where I found the reason to live.

Pakistan has given me a lot.

This year marks the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Pakistan and Japan and the 15th Anniversary of the Establishment of Pakistan-Japan Cultural Association, Sindh.

PJCA is planning to celebrate those landmarks this year, Inshallah.

Today, I can see many people in this audience who have helped me through the years. Sadly, we are missing 3 very important people who have had an enormous presence in my life. The first is Dr. Abdul Khair Kashfi. He is the reason I decided to come here from Japan. I met him in 1970, while I was learning English conversation at the YMCA in Osaka. At that time he was a visiting professor of Urdu at Osaka University of Foreign Languages and in the evening he taught

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English at YMCA. I was very much impressed with his personality. After the YMCA he taught me personally and when he went back to Pakistan in 1973, he invited me to come and see his native country. It took 4 years for me to decide to accept his invitation.

The second person missing from today's gathering is my wife's mother, Humera Khatoon. She was Dr. Kashfi's younger sister. She always wrapped me with her unconditional and limitless affection and love. She enabled both me and my wife to do much in life.

Whenever Asifa and I disagreed on something, she always took my side and supported me.

The third person not here is Fatima Suraiya Bajia. She always helped me personally and officially. As you know she never said no. She was always ready to help those who needed her. Such was her grace that everybody around her thought that he or she was the one closest to her. I am also one who thinks the same. She was, is and always will be my Pakistani mother.

At the end, I would specially like to acknowledge those who are here today, that are my wife and my family. My wife has grown so much as a person and a professional in the years I have known her. In 1993 when she was studying Ikebana intensively at the headquarters of Ikenobo in Kyoto, she sent me a video made by her. In that video I could find her tremendous talent and I felt very proud of her. She has helped me a lot through the years and has been a good partner for me. Thank you.

Due to my work attitude and passion, I have on many occasions sacrificed my family life which may have disturbed and hurt them. I did not do this intentionally. Here I seek their forgiveness and I want to tell them, "I love you."

More than 40 years have passed since I came here. The real honour and treasure I have got through these 40 years is to have got to know you. Each one of you here is my precious treasure and great honour for me. Knowing people like you is the truest gift and reward for me. I pray to Allah for your happiness, good health and success.

Whenever I make speech, I conclude with Mohsin Bhopali saheb's Haiku.

Achay Sachay Dost  
Hain Pakistan Aur Japan  
Dono Pakkay Dost

Pakistan and Japan Dosti Zindabad.

Shukria.