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Congratulating Tunisia

National Days

On the 49th Anniversary of Tunisia's Independence

By Mr. Noritake Kai
President of the Japan-Tunisia Friendship Association
(Former Japanese Ambassador to Tunisia)

Congratulating the people of Tunisia as they celebrate their National Day

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- A message from the president and CEO of Marubeni Corporation

On behalf of the Japan-Tunisia Friendship Association, I would like to express my warmest congratulations to the government and people of Tunisia on the occasion of the 49th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Tunisia.

The prosperity of present-day Tunisia has been fostered through political stability and economic growth under the exceptional leadership of President Bourguiba and President Ben Ali, since the independence of the Republic of Tunisia in 1956, setting an invaluable example for not only Africa, but also for developing countries worldwide. The 49th Anniversary of Tunisia's independence also marks the 49th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Japan and Tunisia. We anticipate further development of the relationship between our countries in the future.

I had revisited Tunisia for the first time in a year and four months as an election observer, through invitation from the Tunisian government, for the presidential and legislative elections which was held on October 24 of last year. About 50 people from 20 countries had been invited as observers, former Upper House member Ms. Kusakabe and I having been invited from Japan. From what I have witnessed, the election was held in an organized and democratic manner, without any difficulties, and captured attention both domestically and internationally as an indicator of the maturity of Tunisian democracy. This was an invaluable opportunity for me because elections did not exist during my service in Tunisia. We hope for further progress in the creation of



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a healthy democracy through the efforts of each citizen, under the guidance of President Ben Ali.

A long-over due visit to Tunisia by former Prime Minister Mori, an issue of concern extending back to the time when I was serving as ambassador, was realized last May. Although, personally, I am disappointed that this was never realized at the time, I feel this visit last year was an extremely significant event for the enhancement of friendship and goodwill between our two countries. On this occasion, a street along a park near the center of Tunis was named "Avenue du Japon". Within my knowledge, this is the first time a street has been named after Japan in the African continent. In the Republic of Panama of Central South America, where I had also served, the street in front of the Japanese Ambassador's Residence has been named "Masayoshi Ohira Street", in honor of former Prime Minister Ohira who had strived to build a friendship with Panama. There is, also, a "Fujiyama Street (Calle Hujiyama)" near the Japan Mexico Center in the south of Mexico City. However, not many examples such as these exist in the world. During my visit to Tunisia last October, I went to see "Avenue du Japon". According to my observation, the area where this street is located is currently not a very busy area, but is rather a street extending towards the future. Particularly with next year's 50th Anniversary of Tunisia's independence and the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between our two countries as a turning point, I believe this street is filled with hope for further progress towards the future of Japan and Tunisia relations. Almost as if in proof of this, certain related parties are supposedly planning the building of a Japanese garden in the adjacent park. Because the people of Tunisia have an understanding of not only the simplicity, but also the beauty hidden deep within Japanese art, the Japanese garden will not only be a symbol of friendship, but at the same time, will be a perfect place for relaxation for the residents of Tunis.

On September 28th of last year, I spoke about Tunisia for 30 minutes through questions and answers on a cable TV program. In the introduction segment, I was asked to describe Tunisia in a single sentence. I answered "A country located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea with mild climate and a population of over 9 million people on a land 40 percent of the size of Japan; President Ben Ali is the second head of state in the approximately 50 years since her independence; Tunisia is politically stable, has a healthy economy and low crime-rates. The social standing of women is high; a friendly country to Japan, with a presence in international society larger than her land size; home of the Site of Carthage and rich in ruins of Rome; and a country to which about 10 thousand Japanese tourists visit annually." It is longer than a single sentence, but the essence of Tunisia is captured in spite of its short length, and I am certain I have succeeded in renewing the image TV viewers had of Tunisia. Also as a promotional activity, a lecture on the situations in North Africa and the Middle East, centering on Tunisia, was held on September 24th by the Japan Morocco Association (Association d'amitie Maroc-Japon). In addition, on February 18th of this year, I spoke about the current situation in the Middle East, touching upon the role of Tunisia, in a speech entitled, "The Present and Future of the Middle East Situation," at the Josuikai, which is an alumni association of the Hitotsubashi University. I would like to continue to seize opportunities such as these and disseminate detailed images regarding the importance of Tunisia to the Japanese people.

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diplomatic ties between our two countries, and the Japan-Tunisia Friendship Association would like to contribute in anyway possible to give significance to this commemorable year. In addition, 2006 marks the 20th anniversary of our association. Therefore, the upcoming year or two is an important turning point for our association. A concert of Arabian classical music, "Le Club Bachraf", hosted by Professor Matsuda of Tama Art University is currently being planned for June 18 of this year, by involved parties. This orchestra, consisting of three women, has experience performing in many Arab countries, and I have heard that their performance in Tunisia in January 2001 had captured the hearts of the people of Tunisia. This June's performance is a precursor to the 50th Anniversary celebratory events next year, and is expected to be held by the Japan-Tunisia Friendship Association. Furthermore, we hope to use this opportunity to invigorate association activities, such as by enriching our newsletter. Cooperation from our readers is greatly appreciated, as well.

In closing, I would like to use this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Ambassador Hannachi, Tunisian Ambassador in Tokyo, for his consistent and active support for our activities.

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