Mr. President,

I would like to thank the President for convening this important meeting. I wish to address both agenda item 35 “the Situation in the Middle East” and agenda item 36 “the Question of Palestine”. I would also like to pay tribute to H.E. Ambassador Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, as we celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People today.

1. The Middle East Peace Process

Mr. President,

The long awaited direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine came to an abrupt halt in April. This was followed by the eruption of the Gaza crisis from July to August. Under these circumstances, we unfortunately do not foresee the resumption of negotiations any time soon. Meanwhile, we see troubling signs of tension, exacerbated by the recent clashes at the Al-Aqsa compound and the attack in the Nar Hof synagogue.

Japan condemns all violence, violation and incitement. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the victims and their bereaved families. We commend the efforts made by the Jordanian government to calm the situation. We welcome that during U.S. Secretary of State Kerry’s recent visit to Amman, the leaders of Israel, Jordan and Palestine have agreed to work to calm the situation. We attach importance to the affirmations made by the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to maintain the status quo on the Al-Aqsa compound.

(check against delivery)
Japan therefore calls on both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to exercise political leadership and courage to ease tensions, refrain from unilateral action as well as incitement. Both sides must work towards enhancing mutual trust for the resumption of peace negotiations.

Mr. President,

The recent crisis in Gaza was the third large-scale conflict in the last six years. The vicious cycle of mistrust and violence must end. Recent events have reaffirmed, once again, the need for a just, durable and comprehensive peace based on a two-state solution.

From this viewpoint, the land seizures by Israel in September in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are not only illegal, but run counter to international efforts towards a two-state solution. Japan calls on Israel to completely freeze its settlement activities, which are violations of international law.

Correspondingly, we look to the Palestinian National Unity Government to remain committed to the renouncement of violence, recognition of the State of Israel and adherence to the previous diplomatic agreements. Japan also calls on Palestine to refrain from any unilateral action that may hinder the resumption of peace negotiations.

Japan has, and will continue to, assist the parties in building mutual confidence. Just this month, the newly appointed Special Envoy of the Government of Japan for Middle East Peace, H.E. Mr. Masaharu Kohno visited Israel and Palestine. He called on government officials from Israel and Palestine to resume direct negotiations. He also reiterated our willingness to contribute to the peace process.

Furthermore, we must look to nurture mutual confidence of future generations. In this regard, Japan recently welcomed ten young leaders from Israel and Palestine under our Invitation Program for Confidence Building. Since 1996, the Japanese government has invited more than 200 youths from Israel and Palestine. These visits have strengthened their mutual trust and deepened their understanding about Japan’s peace efforts towards the Middle East region.
2. Japan’s assistance to Palestine

Mr. President,

Japan pledged to provide more than 20 million dollars in aid towards Palestine at the Gaza Reconstruction Conference held in October, in addition to the 7.8 million dollars already disbursed in August. These constitute a part of Japan’s 200 million dollar pledge announced by our Foreign Minister Kishida at the Conference on the Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestine Development (CEAPAD) held in Jakarta in March.

These commitments, however, were made not for the return to the status quo ante. But rather, they are commitments to support the parties involved in attaining a sustainable ceasefire, peaceful co-existence and prosperity in the region. Therefore, we recall the importance of establishing an international follow-up mechanism that addresses the issues of security, humanitarian aid and good governance. Japan stands ready to work towards this goal with Israel, Palestine and the United Nations among others.

Mr. President,

As we pursue the goal of a two-state solution, we must also strengthen the economic foundations that will underpin the overall political process. From this perspective, Japan continues to make a distinct contribution by mobilizing private investment in Palestine.

One such example is the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative. Its flagship project, the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park complex, seeks to transform the area into an export center. It is anticipated that the project will create 7,000 jobs with expected annual economic benefits of more than 40 million dollars. Moreover, the joint-project led by Japan in collaboration with Israel, Jordan and Palestine is a well-grounded exercise in building mutual confidence on the ground. We are pleased that eleven companies have already signed tenant contracts. One of them is due to begin operations soon.
Japan is also looking to channel the experiences and resources of East Asian countries for Palestine’s development. With this objective in mind, Japan initiated the Conference on the Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD) in February 2013. Numerous capacity building projects in cooperation with Indonesia and Malaysia have already been implemented.

We note with appreciation that, upon a joint-proposal with my distinguished colleague H.E. Ambassador Desra Percaya of Indonesia, this Assembly will welcome the progress of CEAPAD in the resolution entitled “Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine” (A/69/L.24) to be adopted tomorrow.

3. **Closing Remarks**

   The recent Gaza crisis and the ensuing tensions on the ground have demonstrated the urgency of advancing the peace process. Japan, in cooperation with the United Nations and the International Community, remains committed to playing an important role in the pursuit of a durable peace and prosperity in the region.

I thank you, Mr. President.