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**THE ADDRESS BY**

**H.E. Mr. FAISAL TRAD,  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Japan,**

**At Japan Women's University,**

**TOKYO, 13th December, 2005.**



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**MS. SHOKO GOTO,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I, first, would like to express my appreciation to all of you in the Japan women's university, and I am pleased to be able to address you.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia means different things to different people. For millions of followers of Islam across the world it is the ultimate Holy Land and pilgrimage destination. For a large number of expatriates from Asia, Europe and the United States, it is a land of opportunities. For the rest of the world, Saudi Arabia means oil – the lifeline of present and future economies. Saudi Arabia has so far lived up to all these definitions, and is now entering a new phase of its development.

Saudi Arabia Believes that what unites the peoples of the world is ultimately far more important than what divides them and, despite opposition from those eager to promote a clash of civilizations. It will continue to work for mutual respect and increased understanding.

The Government of Saudi Arabia has implemented a number of political and economic reforms to encourage political participation, promote economic growth, increase foreign investment and expand employment opportunities. It has been updating and modernizing its academic curricula, and monitoring its charities through strictly regulated mechanisms. In August 2003, King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue was established to promote the public exchange of ideas as an essential part of life in Saudi Arabia. In November 2004 municipal election was held as part of streamlining local governments. Two independent Human Rights Commissions were established, to provide views and consultations on human rights in the Kingdom.



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Saudi Arabia economy the largest in the Middle East, with a growth rate of the gross domestic product (GDP) of 6.9% in 2004 to reach 248 billion US. dollars. It has a 30% share of GDP in the Arab world and ranked as the 23<sup>rd</sup> economy in the world with foreign trade of about \$100 billion U S. dollars. Economic indications project of this year 2005 will witness higher growth. Saudi Arabia becoming more significant player in international trade by coming the 149 member in the World Trade Organization (WTO), later this year.

The true wealth of any nation is its people, for it is their ability to manage the country's existing resources and to identify and develop new ones, which determines the prosperity of the economy and the health of society for present and future generations.

Mindful of the need to ensure that the Kingdom's population should be equal to the challenges of the developmental process, the government has devoted vast resources to a program covering primary, secondary and higher levels of education. All the Kingdom's Development Plans have taken into account the educational aspirations of the Saudi people, providing free education to all.

The Kingdom is dedicated to providing all Saudis with the best in health care, social services and education. Education is free from kindergarten through university and available to all. By the start of the 21st century, there were nearly 5.2 million students from both gender, in over 26,000 schools, eleven universities, and numerous colleges, training centers, and other educational institutions. There are around 3,300 primary health care centers and over 300 hospitals with nearly 45thousand beds. The social services system aims at improving the quality of life for the entire population of 22 million, stimulating community development and providing assistance to the disabled.

The position of women in Islamic society in general and in Saudi Arabian society in particular is a complex and frequently misunderstood issue. It is certainly true that Muslim and Western views of the role of women show sharp cultural differences but the stereotype of Muslim women, as uneducated, with no rights and no opportunities is a



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caricature born of ignorance or malevolence.

Islam gave women economic and social rights long before such rights were attained by Western women. From the beginning of Islam, women have been legally entitled to inherit and bequeath property, holding their wealth in their own names even after marriage, without obligation to contribute that wealth to their husband or their family, in fact the first business women in Islam was the wife of the Prophet Mohammed.

Women in Saudi Arabia have an important role within the society, and family, it would be a mistake to think that the role of women in Saudi Arabian society is confined to home-making. The development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has brought with it increasing opportunities for women in both education and employment. In 1960, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia undertook the introduction of a national education program for girls. By the mid-1970s, about half of all Saudi Arabian girls were attending school. Now, 93.3% of Saudi women's are literate.

In 2003 there was about halve a million Saudi women in labor force, this represents 15% of the total Saudi labor force. Saudi women are owners or part owners of more than 22000 businesses. Two women were elected as a board member of the Saudi Journalists Association in 2004. Last week Saudi women voted to elect board members for the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and two Saudi businesswomen score victory. In 26<sup>th</sup> of October, 2000 UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has appointed Dr Thouraya Obaid, from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to a key post at one of the UN's agencies.

I believe that, I should stop here, and let our true leaders to speak out, their role in our Saudi society.