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INTERVIEW

“Human Rights are privileges that we have to use”

Interview with H.E. Ambassador Mitsuko Shino

Ms. Mitsuko Shino is Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan, Ambassador to the International Organizations and Chief of the Consulate of Japan in Geneva. A Graduate from the Law Faculty of Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, Ambassador Shino also studied in Tübingen, in what was then West Germany, after joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA). Despite her very busy schedule she kindly answered our questions.



H.E. Ambassador Mitsuko Shino

What are your impressions of Switzerland and Swiss people? Do you enjoy living in this country?

When I arrived here last year, everyone kindly asked me if it was not too difficult to leave the biggest urban area in the world to come to Geneva. Thinking that I came directly from Tokyo, people thought that Switzerland and Geneva would be too quiet and calm. Actually, it was quite the opposite! I came from Iceland whose total number of inhabitants is smaller than the population of the Canton of Geneva. So my first reaction was: too many cars and too many people! The city seems very hectic to me. Having said that, I now enjoy living in Geneva.

Could you please introduce your professional experience?

In 1987, I joined MOFA and I started my career in the division in charge of human rights and refugees. Since I studied international human rights law in university, I was so happy to be able to work for those causes. I still retain my passion for human rights today, therefore I am very grateful that I currently have the chance to humbly contribute to related issues in Geneva.

I have been posted in many European countries, mainly because I studied German prior to my assignments in the embassies. My

first appointments overseas were in Austria. It was really an interesting period, at a time when Germany was on the verge of reunification. However, it was not only Germany, but all of Europe, that had been divided in two in the wake of the Cold War.

After serving in Tokyo from 1992 and then in Germany again from 2000, I was stationed in Poland between 2003 and 2006. So I had the chance to follow the transition of the capital of Germany from Bonn to Berlin, and the expansion of the EU to the east. Poland joined the EU in 2004 together with nine other countries, as part of the biggest expansion of the union. The EU is a very interesting political project, creating a common platform for peace and prosperity after the Second World War. In East Asia, unfortunately, there is no similar attempt.

After serving as director of MOFA's Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division between 2008 and 2010, I was based in Rome from 2011 to 2014. At that time, Europe was dealing with the economic crisis and the Arab uprising was at the doorstep of the continent. After the enlargement of the EU, I won-

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dered if I would then witness it falling apart from the inside.

My last assignment to Iceland was a fantastic experience. I really liked the country, which enjoys a quality of life that you cannot find in big cities, and where society is based on mutual trust. Once the first “shock” passed (*laughs*), I could find some of that same quality here in Switzerland.

You are a specialist in human rights. What motivated you to focus on this specific field?

I would not say specialist, but passionate. At the beginning, like many others, I had this “naïve” dream that protecting human rights will bring the world peace. It was my German experience that really made me realize that human rights are essential not only for achieving peace but also for ensuring that individuals can find fulfillment in life. As I already mentioned, I was in Germany and Austria during the period of change before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. I was there when people in East Germany could vote freely for the first time after the war. I saw an old woman shiver with mixed feelings of fear and joy when she cast her ballot. It was edifying. When we are used to having free and secret voting, we tend to forget how precious this is. Freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of association are fundamental rights to realize free and secret voting, and yet we sometimes take them for granted. At the same time, they are also privileges that we have to use. I still have one

of those beautiful hand-drawn voting posters that we could see in the DDR (East Germany) in 1990. It reminds me that I shall take nothing for granted.

Since 2000, Japanese citizens can vote from abroad. So whenever the occasion arises, I always go around the building to encourage everyone to vote.

What are the advantages of Geneva compared to other important diplomatic centers like New York?

It is a difficult question. There is no capital or center for diplomacy. Diplomacy can take place everywhere; it is a matter of will and people, not of place. Nevertheless, in Geneva you can find a lot of people with rich experience of field work. This is a strong advantage when you have to take important decisions. For instance, it is helpful if you can talk with people who have been working in a refugee camp when discussing displacement. Then the discussion becomes quite concrete and practical. Having all those practitioners here in Geneva is certainly a strong ad-

vantage for diplomacy.

What issues are the centers of discussion at the United Nations in Geneva?

I would say that the most important thing is “prevention”; including prevention of poverty, of war, of human rights violations, and of natural disasters. Today, we know that there is a cost of not doing things. We cannot only react to disasters; we also have to avoid them as much as possible. This is why prevention has become a key notion within international organizations. Prevention can save lives and money.

You have been living in Europe for many years; could you tell us one thing that you like here and one that you miss from Japan?

What I miss is quite clear: convenience stores! In Japan you can find them everywhere, and as the name says, they are really convenient. You can buy almost anything at almost any hour. In Japan we are used to living with this “convenience”, due to the fact that every service is almost always

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H.E. Ambassador Shino wearing Japanese traditional clothes for the National Dress Day of the United Nations Human Rights Council

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available.

What I like in Europe is the exact opposite. Even if it would be convenient to find the shops open when you have to work late, you also place more value on rest times like Sundays. Being obliged to make do with such “inconvenience” and limit my shopping hours also makes me enjoy them more (*laughs*).

What will be the main Japanese events taking place in Switzerland in 2017?

This year, the Consulate of Japan

will hold, as the opening event of our annual “Autumn of Japanese culture”, an exhibition entitled “Parallel Nippon: Contemporary Japanese Architecture 1996-2006” at Versoix Borélo from September 1st. Containing over 100 large-scale photo panels of landmark designs, this exhibition will feature Japan’s most influential architects, including 2013 Pritzker Architecture Prize winner Toyo Ito, as well as Kengo Kuma, Tadao Ando, Kenzo Tange, SANAA, and many more. With a specific focus on the decade

of 1996-2006, during which Japan faced an economic recession and transition from the “bubble” to “post bubble” period, Parallel Nippon is a collection of creative architectural solutions that reflect the social and cultural context of contemporary Japan.

In addition to this exhibition, a variety of events will be arranged as part of the “Autumn of Japanese culture”. Please check our website for the details! http://www.geneve.ch.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_fr/index.html

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INTERVIEW

Japan is strongly supporting free-trade

On June 06, Japan and the European Union agreed on a free trade agreement. While details are still to be settled, the “JEFTA” will be the largest free-trade deal in the world and one of the most ambitious. It will indeed cover 99% of the joint production of both Japan and the EU. The two economies represent together more than one-third of global GDP.

The deal is expected to boost Japanese exports by 29% and could represent an additional growth of 0.29% of GDP.

Started in 2013, the JEFTA has become a priority after the American withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). If Japan has decided to focus on Europe, it is also true in the other way. Negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership being currently frozen, the EU had to find a new partner to promote free

trade.

As Prime Minister Abe said: “Japan and the EU have demonstrated our strong political will to raise the flag of free trade high when there are moves towards protectionism in the world.”

Although the JEFTA will be the biggest economic partnership agreement negotiated by Japan this year, it is not the only one. Japan is eager to maintain the TPP even without the US. The eleven remaining countries met last week in Tokyo to negotiate a “TPP11” based on the previous one. By minimizing modifications Japan expects to finalize negotiations within the end of the year.

What does it mean for the Swiss-Japanese relationship?

Switzerland and Japan have been united by a free trade agreement

since 2009. Both countries have benefited from this agreement increasing the already considerable trade between them. However, the JEFTA is more ambitious than the Swiss-Japanese trade agreement, and the advantage that companies on both sides have compared to the European ones will disappear after the entry in force of JEFTA (probably in 2019). In last year November’s issue of our newsletter, we already saw that times may have come for an update of the agreement.

With the JEFTA perspective it seems more important than ever. This said, one positive outcome of the JEFTA is that the new standards and concessions granted in it can inspire the revision of the Japan Switzerland FTEPA.

活動

ACTIVITY

How Robots help people

革新

INNOVATION

Toyota recently completed the first North American in-home trial of the Human Support Robot (HSR). “Partner robot”, like the HSR, can assist people with everyday activities. For this first trial, the HSR assists the Decorated U.S. war veteran Romulo Camargo in his everyday life. Left paralyzed from the neck down by war injuries, the robot can provide him with some assistance. Toyota’s robotics research includes a large variety of applications to assist people with limited mobility. Those robots can be autonomous like the HSR, or robotic suits that can help people to move or carry heavy objects or even people. If some robots are still

prototypes, others are already used in everyday life. Over the past year, a manufacturer has equipped their workers with Panasonic’s robotics

suits that help them to carry loads of up to 80kg with no effort. In this case, robots help to protect workers’ health.



Toyota’s Human Support Robot

Agenda

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- ✓ TECHINASIA Tokyo 2017
Startups meeting investors.
Date: September 27-28, 2017, Bellesalle Shibuya Garden, Tokyo
<https://www.techinasia.com/events/tokyo>

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO’s core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

*The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online:
<http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>*

JETRO

Japan External Trade Organization

JETRO Geneva
80, Rue de Lausanne
1202 Geneva
Phone: 022 732 13 04
Fax: 022 732 07 72
E-mail: SWG@jetro.go.jp