



JSDF members work on a road construction project in Juba, South Sudan.
Photo: Courtesy of Ministry of Defense

PEACEKEEPING

The JSDF and PKO

Japan has been contributing to the reconstruction of countries devastated by conflicts or disasters for nearly twenty-five years through the participation of the Japan Self-Defense Forces in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO).

TOSHIO MATSUBARA

JAPAN established the Act on Cooperation with United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations (the International Peace Cooperation Act) in June 1992. That same year, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) participated in UNPKO in Cambodia. Since then, the JSDF has engaged in thirteen more UNPKOs and refugee assistance operations in countries and regions including the Golan Heights, Timor-Leste, Haiti and, most recently, South Sudan.

Since January 2012, Japan has dispatched JSDF units to the United Nations Mission in the Republic

of South Sudan (UNMISS), which was formed when the country became independent in July 2011. Some 3,900 JSDF personnel have been dispatched to South Sudan to date, where they have primarily been engaged in repairing roads and other infrastructure in the capital of Juba.

“Partly because I had experience with disaster relief operations including the response to the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, I was eager to participate in PKO activities,” says Captain Masaaki Nakamura of the 8th Division Command in Kyushu, who served in a 350-strong JSDF Engineering Unit dispatched to South Sudan from November 2015 to June 2016. Captain Nakamura led a team of thirty-five members in the repair of damaged main roads in the city with heavy machinery such as bulldozers and excavators. It was arduous work in temperatures that could rise to 55°C.

“Our top priority was consideration for the local residents in each area we worked. We occasionally



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- 1 A JSDF member teaches car maintenance to South Sudanese trainees as part of the Sakura Project.
- 2 JSDF members share a laugh with children at the orphanage they visited.
- 3 Captain Masaaki Nakamura
- 4 Captain Masaaki Nakamura with Juma Ago Isaac holding gifts he received from JSDF members.



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received personal requests for help from residents, and we tried to respond to them so long as they did not hamper our mission.”

One day a local resident approached the team and said, “I want to work with you. I don’t need any compensation.” The man, named Juma Ago Isaac, called Captain Nakamura “Boss,” and Captain Nakamura welcomed him to the team as the 36th member. Captain Nakamura says Juma worked hard alongside the other members for eight days until eventually the work in the area was completed.

“When I asked him why he wanted to help, he said, ‘All of us really appreciate the Japanese people’s activities here. Although we have different skin colors, the blood flowing in our bodies is the same. Thus, I would like to help as a person.’ He also said, ‘Japanese people always greet us with smiles. So, they can be recognized immediately and leave a very good impression. They make me feel like helping.’”

In addition to repairing roads and other infrastructure, the JSDF has carried out a human resource development support program known as the Sakura

Project. In this project, which has been held three times at the camp of the Japanese unit, the JSDF personnel passed on knowledge and skills such as car maintenance, concrete construction, IT networks and sewing to trainees learning at the Multi-service Training Center in Juba. The Center was constructed with the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) using training tools and materials also provided by JICA.

The JSDF personnel also promoted exchange with South Sudanese people through volunteer activities. For instance, they visited an orphanage in Juba and played sports and games with the children, including making traditional Japanese toys.

“The JSDF conducted its first PKO activity in Cambodia, and to this day the Cambodian people still express a great appreciation for Japan. For this reason, the Cambodian PKO force that operates the hospital within the UN facilities and Japanese unit share a very strong bond,” says Captain Nakamura. “If South Sudanese people should come to feel the same way about Japan as the Cambodian people do, we couldn’t be happier.”

Photos: Courtesy of Ministry of Defense (1, 2); Toshio Matsubara (3); Courtesy of Masaaki Nakamura (4)