

Japan

Atsuko Toyama

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Born in 1938, Mrs. TOYAMA graduated from the University of Tokyo, Department of Law. She started her career as Official of the Ministry of Education (MESSC). In 1977, she subsequently became Director of Information and Library Division, Science and International Affairs Bureau (MESSC), Director of International Scientific Affairs Division (1980), Director of Lower Secondary School Division of the Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau (1982), Director of Planning Division of the Higher Education Bureau (1985), Director-General of the Local Education Support Bureau (1991), Director-General of the Higher Education Bureau (1992). She was Director-General of the Cultural Affairs Department at the Agency for Cultural Affairs (1988), Deputy Commissioner (1989), Commissioner (1994). From 1996 to 2000 she served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Japan in Turkey. In April

2000, she was appointed as Director-General of the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo. In April 2001, Mrs. Toyama took up the post of Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

Learning to live together

For the nations to learn to live together in harmony in the era of globalisation I believe the pursuit of universally shared values and the encouragement of pluralism, especially the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, is vital.

In education, this goal can be approached by fostering the attitude to understand each other as well as by learning from the entities that lay the foundations for mutual understanding.

More concretely, the first step forward is coming to know the existence of various values and ways of thinking and to receive them with sincere interest. The contents of education should be formulated accordingly to match this goal, and to provide many opportunities as possible for direct contact and dialogue among these various existences is important.

The most effective and direct way to achieve this goal would be through the physical exchange of people such as students and teachers. However, under limited resources, the quantitative achievement through this method would have a certain upper limit. I therefore would like to note the importance of making the best use of our new technologies. Virtual exchanges between people in the cyber space by the use of Internet could also be an effective way to achieve this goal. It may not be a perfect substitute for the physical exchanges, but it certainly has its own merits. Not only could these new technologies be effective for the dialogue between people with less restrictions to time and resources, but it could also be a powerful source for the dissemination of various cultures.

I am aware that there exists the challenges of the digital divide between nations or the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. However, we must not hesitate to use these new information and communication technologies in education because of this divide. Rather, we should work together towards the provision of the necessary environment for the use of the information and communication technologies in order to realise learning to live together for all. ♪