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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It took us many years to rally our Afghan Fellowship community, and indeed ourselves, to carve the time, energy and space to produce this book, the idea of which had been on our minds for long. Then, just as momentum was at its peak, and papers and contributions were pouring in, in August of 2021 the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan and seemingly undid, in a mere few weeks, what the Fellowship had strived to achieve over close to two decades.

At that point we almost gave up on the book, but for a persistent question that kept haunting us: ‘Had it all been a waste then?’

The completion of this manuscript is our response to that question.

A collection of writings by multiple members of the UNITAR Hiroshima Fellowship for Afghanistan (AF), this book covers the period from the inception of the program in early 2002, until the present day. Ironically, over this past year we have found that the need to share its lessons has become ever more critical, precisely because the events of August 2021 in Afghanistan loom so large over everything else. It seemed essential to us to try not just to document but also share widely the Fellowship story, so that future generations may learn from the challenges and accomplishments of an international development effort that, even though small, was path-breaking, long-term, dynamic and most importantly, Afghan-driven.

But the book also tells a compelling human story, a story of different people coming together from around the world, to solve problems and initiate solutions — regardless of language, cultural barriers, age, race or technological challenges.

We both have personal memories and reminiscences of each of the authors in these pages, and in fact of the Afghan Fellowship's more than 500 alumni, mentors, faculty members, partners, and UNITAR staff. It will be difficult to thank every one of them here, but may they know how much they have each influenced us, teaching us to think afresh about international cooperation, human resource development, Afghanistan, Japan and, indeed, life. Two people — Michael Fors and Sabahuddin Sokout — need a special mention, for they were not just pillars of the Fellowship and our advisors throughout, but over time have become like brothers to us.

We are grateful to authorities in Hiroshima and across Japan, Afghanistan and other countries, who unstintingly sustained the Fellowship over the years. Our gratitude to UNITAR, which has been our professional and intellectual home, and to the many colleagues there who supported the Fellowship, and now the Afghan Fellowship Legacy Projects (AFLP), with ardor and intelligence. A special thanks to our young researchers Yuko Baba, Jenny Xin Luan and Taiga Nishimura for their able assistance to this publication, to Mihoko Kumamoto, Sharapiya Kakimova, Lorne Jaques and David Eaton for unstinting moral and material support, to Barbara and Isshu Fujiwara for generously giving of their time and talents, and to Chang Li Lin, for her solidarity and wise counsel over the years.

Finally we are grateful for the chance to work together again, something that over more than 25 years has never failed to bring us personal joy, intellectual camaraderie and professional complementarity. We hope that this book, a labor of love by all who have contributed, builds a realistic narrative of the struggles and successes

of a unique community. Its members may now be scattered around the world but they carry within them, and will hopefully bring to fruition one day, the many seeds planted during the exceptional years of the UNITAR Hiroshima Fellowship for Afghanistan.

Nassrine Azimi & Humaira Khan-Kamal

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