

Emperor's video message hints at desire to abdicate

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Emperor Akihito, who has been reported as having expressed his desire to abdicate, spoke on his feelings in a video message released on Aug. 8, referring to his physical weakening as he ages and stating that he is concerned it could become difficult for him to engage in his duties with his whole being.

Based on the stipulation in Japan's Constitution that the Emperor "shall not have powers related to government," the Emperor avoided stating a concrete opinion relating to the Imperial Household system, though his expressions indicated that he wishes to abdicate.

The 11-minute video message was released at 3 p.m. on Aug. 8. It showed the Emperor reading from a document. The Imperial Household Agency released the full text of the message. The video was filmed at 4:30 p.m. on Aug. 7 in a reception room at the Imperial Palace. It is extremely unusual for the Emperor to establish a special occasion to express to the public his thoughts on his official duties.

In his video message, Emperor Akihito looked back on spending time since ascending the Chrysanthemum Throne while pursuing a desirable position of the Emperor as a symbol of the State and of the unity of the People. "While, being in the position of the Emperor, I must refrain from making any specific comments on the existing Imperial system, I would like to tell you what I, as an individual, have been thinking about," the Emperor said.



Emperor Akihito expresses his thoughts in a video message. (Photo courtesy of the Imperial Household Agency)

He also spoke on his current age of 82, saying, "As I am now more than 80 years old and there are times when I feel various constraints such as in my physical fitness, in the last few years I have started to reflect on my years as the Emperor, and contemplate on my role and my duties as the Emperor in the days to come."

Household Agency)

The Emperor also expressed his view that it is difficult to decrease his official duties as he grows older. "In coping with the aging of the Emperor, I think it is not possible to continue reducing perpetually the Emperor's acts in matters of state and his duties as the symbol of the State," he said.

The Emperor also touched on differences between appointing a regent for him and abdicating.

"A Regency may be established to act in the place of the Emperor when the Emperor cannot fulfill his duties for reasons such as he is not yet of age or he is seriously ill," the Emperor said. "Even in such cases, however, it does not change the fact that the Emperor continues to be the Emperor till the end of his life, even though he is unable to fully carry out his duties as the Emperor."

The Emperor referred to the fact that "society comes to a standstill" when the Emperor has ill health and his condition becomes serious, impacting people's lives, and that in the Imperial Family it has been a practice following the demise of the Emperor for events of heavy mourning to continue every day for two months, followed by funeral events which continue for one year. He then stated, "These various events occur simultaneously with events related to the new era," and said this places a heavy strain on those involved and the family left behind. He said, "It occurs to me from time to time to wonder whether it is possible to prevent such a situation."

The Emperor noted in his message that "under the Constitution, the Emperor does not have powers related to government." He then said it was his hope that "the duties of the Emperor as the symbol of the State can continue steadily without a break," and closed his message by saying, "I sincerely hope for your understanding."

It was reported on July 13, 2016, that the Emperor had expressed his intention to abdicate to officials in the Imperial Household Agency. Discussion subsequently emerged surrounding the Emperor's true thoughts, and the Imperial Household Agency had been making arrangements for him to publicly express his thoughts at an early stage.

It was the second time for the Emperor to express his feelings in a video message, following a message in March 2011 in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.