

Remarks by Ambassador of Japan to Zambia MIZUUCHI Ryuta
Presentation of a Letter of Credentials
29 January 2020

Your Excellency, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary General of COMESA,

Let me begin by congratulating COMESA on its 25th anniversary since its foundation. As I mentioned during the opening of the 40th Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee in November last year, it was indeed my great honour to represent Japan on such a commemorative occasion.

Also in my remarks at the meeting, I shared the key message of the TICAD7 meeting, which is that the business will be at the core of Japan's future foreign policy towards Africa, and it presents both opportunity and challenge to Japan and African nations. As Ambassador of Japan to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA, I am ready to encourage our businesspeople to expand their businesses to Africa, but in order for me to do so, they need assurance that their engagement will be duly rewarded. And in this regard, I do believe that regional cooperation including COMESA has an important role to play – in particular for the following reasons:

During the year-end and New Year break, I visited Livingstone twice. There I saw not only the rocky Victoria "Walls," but also experienced how local people come and go beyond the borders. Long-distance trucks are stuck in queues and in the parking space waiting for the customs clearance. Tourists were merely the minority among mobs of local people who rush to the passport control. Diplomats were called upon to register themselves in a secure but highly classical manner – namely by handwriting. The need to install

One Stop Border Posts (OSBP) was thus perceived to be enormous. And once the Kazungula Bridge is complete, the foreseen higher demand for efficiency in processing cross-border procedures must be definitely taken care of. Whereas cross-border mobility of goods and services contributes to expanding economic activities, the borders must remain effectively secure in order to prevent terrorists and criminals from moving around unnoticed.

On a related note, I have another reason why my expectations for COMESA are high. When I left Japan in last October, my household goods I had shipped from Japan to Zambia had been already on their way. Three months later, I was informed in early December that they arrived at Beira in Mozambique and would be coming to Lusaka in one week's time. However, the joy turned out to be premature because the local office in Lusaka told me that it was not aware of any information on the whereabouts of my packages. This insecurity of my mental health lasted over Christmas and New Year, till I could finally receive my household goods on January 6. This experience made me a firm advocate for the regional economic cooperation in the Southern African region in the sense of COMESA.

Your Excellency, I believe that a regional institution with achievements such as expansion of intra-trade from 3 billion US dollars in 2000 to 22.4 billion in 2014 through the establishment of Free Trade Area (FTA) in 2000 must have the capacity to further expand. Japan External Trade Organization, JETRO, published an article on African Continental Free Trade Area, AfCFTA, shortly after the launch of its operational phase at the last year's AU summit. It was forecasted in the article that once AfCFTA enters into force, it will expand Japan's export destinations in Africa. Now, I am asking myself how COMESA comes into the scope of such a development. The multi-layered structure of various regional institutions, such as COMESA, SADC, EAC ECOWAS and etc., whose membership

overlaps in some, but not all cases, is somewhat complicated. Potential investors in Japan might get confused as to how they may or may not interact with each other. As Special Representative of Japan to COMESA, I hope I will be able to get a deep insight in this respect through more intensive exchanges with the COMESA Secretariat and the member states, and contribute to further deepening the cooperation between Japan and COMESA

Now I have the honour to present to Your Excellency the letter of credentials as Special Representative of Japan to COMESA.