

Happy 56th Independence Day:

H.E. MIZUUCHI Ryuta, Ambassador of Japan Wishes Zambia a Happy 56th Independence Day

On the occasion of the 56th Independence Day of the Republic of Zambia, I would like to extend to the Zambian people my heartfelt congratulations from the people of Japan.

As all nations around the globe have seen the tumultuous impact of COVID-19 pandemic in this year 2020 so far, so was Zambia's socio-economic life very much affected. Yet, as I found myself unable to travel to other countries, let alone take a leave back home, the most feared scenario could be spared – no lockdown was imposed, necessary medical services were maintained, and, above all, the basic lifeline was kept intact – albeit in accordance with the circumstances of the “New Normal” – masking, sanitizing and keeping social distance everywhere. I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for all the efforts undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Zambia, as well as the Zambian people at large. Every man and woman of this country deserves a high commendation, having made his/her own contribution to mastering this challenge.

Amid these difficulties, I was encouraged to note that the support from Japan in the health sector which I had the pleasure of announcing, was met with an overwhelmingly positive response from the Zambian public. Indeed, Japan's consistent support to Zambia's efforts towards achieving a resilient national healthcare system constitutes one of the main pillars of our bilateral relations. As the pandemic may have much longer implications than one might think, I am hopeful and confident that the provision of medical equipment to the frontline medical institutions (ca. JPY 200m, signed on August 20th) and the upgrading of Mushili and Chamboli Health Centres in the Copperbelt to Level One Hospitals (ca. JPY 2.65b, signed on July 14th) will be a meaningful contribution to making Zambia's medical and healthcare system even more robust.

Likewise, the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors of G20 agreed, at their meeting held virtually just 10 days ago, to extend their Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) by 6 months, beyond the end of this year. This is merely a modest step, and

although the main efforts must be made by the Zambian Government itself to achieve debt sustainability, in cooperation with the IMF as well as the creditors and the respective Governments, it will positively bring about an impetus in favour of Zambia. Hopefully, the GRZ will take advantage of this situation and accelerate the reform process that will truly serve the nation and its people.

The period in which COVID practically “contained” me within the Zambian border graced me with a rare opportunity to discover and appreciate the beauty and potential of this country. I am thankful to the fate in this particular regard and hope very much that the challenge that was imposed on us by the COVID pandemic will trigger an opening of a new era in which this potential will be explored to the full extent – in our East Asian wisdom, a horse that has gone astray may bring back another, which, in turn, may be an omen of a fortune anew. This is how we understand life, and it may also be relevant where life is as wild as the rich game reserve here and there in Zambia. I will assure you that Japan will stand side by side with Zambia even in difficulties in the future as well.

Precisely today 56 years ago, we were witnessing the Ending Ceremony of the Tokyo Olympic Games of 1964. It was here that the national flag of a country which had been formerly called Northern Rhodesia and newly became independent as Zambia, was hoisted internationally for the first time. The Zambian Independence Day thus links automatically with the Tokyo Olympics. As Japan will be hosting the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games 2020 with a year's delay next year, I cannot but hope the 57th year since Independence will bring many moments of bliss and affection to all of us, with the Zambian National Olympic and Paralympic Team showing a good performance in Tokyo.

On this auspicious occasion, let me once again reiterate: DOKURITSU KINEMBI OMEDETOU GOZAIMASU! (“Happy Independence Day!” in Japanese)