

Check against delivery

Remarks by H.E. Mr. MIZUUCHI Ryuta, Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Zambia on the occasion of the Official Ground-Breaking Ceremony for “The Project for Upgrading Health Centres to District Hospitals in Copperbelt Province” on Friday 23 April 2021

Hon. Dr. Jonas Chanda, Minister of Health of the Republic of Zambia,
Dr. Kennedy Malama, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health,
Senior Officials from Government and Copperbelt Province Present,
Representatives from Media Houses,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I am here on the Copperbelt for the first time since my assumption of office as Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Zambia, which was made possible by this auspicious occasion of Ground-Breaking for the two new future District Hospitals in Ndola and Kitwe, to be upgraded from respective Health Centres. I, therefore, take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Jonas Chanda for initiating this event, as well as all those concerned who have worked extremely hard to make it come true.

The official title of this project is called “The Project for Upgrading of Health Centres to District Hospitals in the Copperbelt Province”, the document of which I had the honour of signing and exchanging in August last year, with Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Bwalya Ng’andu at his office. Following the Exchange of Notes, the detailed design of this project, including the buildings, facilities, and equipment, is currently being worked out by the potential bidders to this project. The winner of the competition will be awarded the main contract and is expected to be announced by September this year. Hon. Minister Chanda and I have agreed to have another Ceremony to inaugurate the commencement of construction with the presence of the main contractor from Japan later this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, this will be the third project of this kind in Zambia to upgrade Health Centres to District Hospitals, following two preceding projects in the Lusaka Province in the years 2013 and 2016, respectively. The costs of the Copperbelt project will amount to up to 2.65 billion Japanese Yen or almost 24 million US Dollars. It will serve to improve the access of many civil populations to advanced medical services. Just as the people of Lusaka have already begun to visualise the concrete benefit of the hospital upgrading, I am confident that citizens of Ndola and Kitwe will also be able to cherish an improvement as the project takes off today – and even much more when it is completed.

I was told that the two sites of this project were chosen, taking into consideration various aspects and elements; the most decisive factor was undoubtedly the density of population and its foreseeable significant increase in the future. In other words, the need to improve the congestion of patients in the respective areas outweighed the value of other potential candidates, more concretely:

【Mushili】

Mushili is an area with a particularly high population growth rate in Ndola District. The catchment area of the new Hospital was estimated to have the population of 55,850. The number of referrals of the Mushili Health Centre to the higher hospitals increased from 694 in 2014 to 760 in 2018; the number of outpatients by 45% from 24,145 to 35,172 in the same period; the number of deliveries by 387% from 111 to 541; and the number of TB outpatients also by 202% from 1,265 to 3,828 respectively. In addition, as of January 2019, there were only 3 ambulances in the entire district including Mushili. It was considered essential to establish a Level 1 Hospital with emergency treatment capabilities.

【Chamboli】

Chamboli is an area from where the transportation of patients to the Kitwe Teaching Hospital requires a long time. Since its opening in 2016, Chamboli Health Centre has been providing primary health services such as outpatient

clinic, prenatal and postnatal examinations, ARTS, VCT, and family planning. With the catchment area population of 22,192 (est.), the number of referrals, combined with those of nearby Wusakile Health Centre, has increased by almost 50% from 760 in 2016 to 1,140 in 2018. In 2018, outpatients at the Chamboli Health Centre alone numbered 15,199, TB patients 35, and prenatal checkups 1,488, showing a steady increase since its opening. As of January 2019, only 2 ambulances in the entire district were operational – an additional reason that establishing a level 1 hospital capable of handling emergency cases was perceived to be critical.

The upgrading of these two selected Health Centres will serve to improve the circumstances as mentioned above, by mitigating the chronic congestion of referrals from these places to Level 2 and 3 Hospitals located far away. Further, the referral system of the Copperbelt Province in general will be strengthened, with the number of unnecessary referrals being reduced accordingly. Thus, the entire benefit of the upgrading will be much higher than that directly attributable to the two areas.

More significantly, this project will be launched at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has affected medical institutions nationwide and put a huge number of medical doctors and medical workers under great pressure. True, this project is not an immediate response to the pandemic. However, it does strengthen Zambia's healthcare system itself in the long run, enabling, among other things, the Zambian Government to deal with infectious and other common but serious diseases more effectively with the latest design and equipment. COVID-19 may subside sooner or later with the arrival of vaccines. However, new pandemics are sure to occur with certain intervals. We must think ahead to prepare for the future – for a time when we face such a situation. With a strengthened healthcare system at large, Zambia will emerge as a more robust and resilient player in Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of healthcare. If Zambia becomes a model for Africa, Japan and Zambia can together contribute to strengthening the Universal Health Care in the African Continent as a whole.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Copperbelt, being the second most densely populated province in Zambia, has

been the regional focus of Japan's development assistance for a long time, in such areas as improvement of road traffic or water supply. I cannot mention each and every project but would simply like you to take a look at the attached list of projects. You will see that Japan is mobilizing both official and non-Governmental resources to help the sustainable development of the Province in various sectors. Moreover, Japan is also providing a football player to this Province: namely, an ex-J-leaguer NAKAMACHI Kosuke has been playing in Ndola and Kitwe for the Zambian National League since 2019.

Honourable Minister, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

In concluding, I would like to express my sincere appreciation anew to all those involved in this Project and wish them good luck and continued health, and this important Project a great success. Let us hope that this Project will contribute to further enhancing the cordial relations between the people and Governments of Japan and Zambia. And together we will not only prove victorious in our fight against COVID-19 but also prevail in our quest to achieve Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015.

Thank you for your attention.