

Remarks by H.E. Mr. MIZUUCHI Ryuta, Ambassador of Japan to Zambia
Send-off Ceremony for Zambian Olympic Contingent
Wednesday, 19 May 2021

Dr. John Phiri, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development,
Mr. John Zulu, Director of Sport, Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development,
Mr. Boniface Kambikambi, Secretary General, National Olympic Committee of Zambia,
Officials from the National Olympic Committee of Zambia,
Zambian Olympic Athletes and Coaches,
Mr. NAKAMACHI Kosuke, Ex-J-League Football Player,
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the Media Houses,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the occasion of today's Send-off Ceremony for Zambian Olympic Contingent for the upcoming Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, I would like to welcome you all to my Residence. First of all, let me extend my heartfelt congratulations, on behalf of the People and the Government of Japan, to the Zambian athletes who have qualified for participating in the Olympic Games, as well as their coaches for this success. Also, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the National Olympic Committee of Zambia for collaborating with the Embassy to hold this special event. My special thanks go to Dr. John Phiri, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, who kindly accepted my invitation to take part in this ceremony as the Guest of Honour.

At the outset, I would like to give you a quiz. What day did the last Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964 close? Does any of you have any idea? I know, for sure, but only after I came here to serve as Ambassador of Japan to Zambia. The answer is 24th October. What day is this for Zambia? That is its Independence Day, of course. But what does this coincidence mean? It means that at the Closing Ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics 1964, the Olympians from what used to be Northern Rhodesia hoisted the Zambian National Flag

and marched in front of international spectators. It was the moment that the new-born Zambian Nation was introduced to the world for the first time.

It also means that the ties between Japan and Zambia have been connected so closely by the Tokyo Olympics, from the moment Zambia declared its independence. But I wish to stress that there was more to it than that alone.

Zambia declared its independence at the moment it turned 24th October, the day of the Closing Ceremony, and this was 7:00 hrs. in Tokyo. The organizers were aware that the independence of Zambia had been prepared, but not much was shared concerning the meaning of this historical event, not to mention the design of the national flag of Zambia. Furthermore, there was no internet at that time. Nor was there any modern communication technology. How was it possible for the organizers under such circumstances to prepare the Zambian National Flag in time for the Closing Ceremony? Based on very scarce information on the future flag of Zambia, those responsible for the Closing Ceremony made it all by hand – by hand-knitting and sewing, without using the sewing machine – even working throughout the night on the day before.

It was against this backdrop that the Zambian Team, which had hoisted the Flag of Northern Rhodesia at the time of the Opening Ceremony, marched with the newly made Zambian Flag, solemnly and proudly, at the Closing Ceremony, as I mentioned earlier. This, I believe, symbolizes the relationship between Japan and Zambia. No wonder, therefore, why Japanese and Zambians feel so close to each other.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now briefly introduce to you what we call the “Host Town” initiative. In addition to its literal meaning that some local administrations in many parts of Japan have volunteered to host specific Olympic Delegations and athletes, it also serves to foster a long-lasting relationship between the citizens of these Host Towns and the country that they are hosting. Zambia has two Host Towns, namely, Asahi City in Chiba Prefecture and Marumori Town in Miyagi Prefecture. They are preparing many activities and exchanges in such areas as sport, culture, and economy.

Young schoolchildren in elementary and secondary grades are eagerly learning about Zambia and ready to welcome you. JICA volunteers who had to evacuate to Japan due to COVID-19 in March last year have been helping them understand the geography, history, culture, or tradition of Zambia. Asahi City junior high students are making videos for Olympians of Zambia, a part of which will be played later today. As for Marumori Town, they have been interacting with Zambia already since 2011 within the framework of JICA technical assistance.

A good example of such exchanges is those between Cameroon and Nakatsue Village (today part of Hita City) in Oita Prefecture, which started out of the Football World Cup Japan-South Korea 2002 and has been nurtured to date. I hope very much that a similar friendship will be born from exchanges this time between Zambian Olympians and the citizens of those two communities in Japan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me brief you a little bit on the COVID-19 situation in Japan. As you all know, the pandemic has not only postponed the Tokyo Olympics 2020 for a year. It is also impacting the socio-economic life in Japan even today. Currently, nine Prefectures including Tokyo are under the state of emergency. But we are hopeful to be able to host the Olympic Games for the athletes from all over the world. Efforts are being made on all fronts to make it possible. This would send a signal to the world that we are all “victors in the fight” against the COVID-19.

In any case, Japan and Zambia will never lose in our relationship between our two countries. We will come even closer to each other through the good performance shown by the Zambian National Contingent. As Japan and Africa celebrate the 440th anniversary of relationship since the First African Samurai was hired by Oda Nobunaga in 1581, I hope that the 32 “Zambian Samurais” will leave behind unforgettable footsteps in Japan with the Tokyo Olympic Games 2020. As for me, I am looking forward to watching your performance on TV here in Lusaka and welcoming you back home after the Games.

Again, wishing you all the best and a great success in Olympics Games, I thank you for your attention!