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Remarks by H.E. Mr. MIZUUCHI Ryuta, Ambassador of Japan to Zambia
at the Send-off Ceremony for Zambian Paralympic Contingent
Friday, 30th July 2021

Mr. John Kinuna, President, National Paralympic Committee of Zambia,
Mr. Moses Chishimba, Secretary General, National Paralympic Committee
of Zambia,
Ms. Monica Munga, Para-athlete representing the Republic of Zambia,
And her coach Mr. Chrispin Mwale,
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the Media Houses,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the occasion of today's Send-off Ceremony for Zambian Paralympic Contingent for the upcoming Tokyo 2020 Paralympic 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 Ms. Monica Munga who has qualified for participating in the Paralympic Games, as well as her coach for this success. Also, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the National Paralympic Committee of Zambia for collaborating with the Embassy to hold this special event.

Last week, on 23rd July, the Tokyo Olympic torch was finally lit. Everyone in every nation is excited by the performances of the Olympians. So am I, being among those who are sending cheers and hurrahs to their compatriot athletes, many thousand kilometers away from home. Zambians, too, are demonstrating their talent and power – look at the Copper Queens and the boxers!

And today, I am delighted to welcome Ms. Monica Munga with us, another athlete from Zambia who will be taking part in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, starting from 24th August. I am sure she is also motivated and dedicated to performing what she can. Together with other Paralympians from all over the world, she will certainly inspire many people, young and old, and send us a strong message that we are overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic that has been overshadowing our life for the last 18 months.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now, let me highlight briefly how Japan started to engage in Paralympic Games.

After welcoming the newly born Zambian Nation on 24th October 1964, the day of closing of Tokyo Olympic Games, the Paralympic Games were held in Tokyo from 8th November 1964. This was the first time Japan took part in it. In fact, the first Paralympic Games ever were held in Rome in 1960, though under a different name. Tokyo followed suit, by hosting the international sporting event for the people with disabilities for the first time outside Europe.

It was a medical doctor by the name of Dr Yutaka NAKAMURA, known as "Japan's Father of Paralympics," who made it come true. He was sent to the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Great Britain to study how to treat people with spinal injuries and bring them back to normal life – a programme initiated by Dr Ludwig Guttmann, a Jewish-German medical doctor. There, Dr Nakamura was shocked to see how patients with severe injuries were brought back to life after a short period of time. The secret of the treatment was the rehabilitation programme with sport. From 1948, Dr Guttmann had been organising annually the "Stoke Mandeville Games" at the hospital, which is regarded as the origin of the Paralympic Games.

At that time, there was little understanding in Japan for those who attempted to provide people with disabilities with sport as treatment or instrument of rehabilitation. Dr Nakamura acted against a storm of criticism from society and the medical community, having been branded as "mad" as he was striving with the idea of holding Tokyo Paralympics. Nevertheless, he pushed himself through and made the impossible a reality, thus establishing an environment in Japan in which people with disabilities can also enjoy sports.

In his book, Dr Nakamura describes how he felt at that time while he was staying in Britain, as the following.

"I felt as if I had been given a great goal for the first time at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. I also understood that Dr Guttmann's treatment policy known as 'sport over surgery' was the most appropriate approach to

rehabilitation medicine."

Having founded the "Oita Prefecture Sports Association for the Physically Challenged" and organised the first Sports Festival in 1960, he even brought two athletes to the Stoke Mandeville Games in 1962, financing the trip for the delegation by selling his own car. Dr Nakamura received a strong support from Dr Guttmann and others for his initiative to hold the Paralympics 1964 in Tokyo back-to-back to the Olympic Games. The passion of this young doctor, then 37, paved the way to the Paralympic movement in Japan.

In a report from that time, the Japanese para-athletes who took part in the Games expressed their feelings as follows:

"I have gained confidence that I can do it". "I think the Paralympics have revolutionised the way we think about disability issues". "Living with para-athletes from other countries for a week was a very precious and valuable experience."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The aspirations of Dr Nakamura, who dedicated his life to the promotion of sports for the physically challenged, have prevailed. Today, many companies are lending their support to help promote Paralympics. Among them is Hitachi Construction Machinery Zambia, and I welcome its President, Mr. Hattori, who is supporting Ms. Munga and sports in general for the people with disabilities in Zambia. Also, JICA Volunteers (JOCV) have been providing trainings to Para-athletes, which, as I understand, Ms. Munga attended as well. For this reason, we have with us here Mr. Tokuhashi, Chief Representative of JICA Zambia Office. I invite you all to give them a warm applause.

In concluding, I would like to extend my best wishes to Ms. Munga and wish her all the best at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, where she, too, I am sure, will have many valuable experiences. It is my sincere hope that she will bring them back home and become one of "Zambia's Mothers" of sports for the people with disabilities.

Thank you very much for your attention.