**Remarks by H.E. Ambassador MIZUUCHI at the Conferment Ceremony of Japanese Foreign Minister’s Commendation upon School of Veterinary Medicine of UNZA**

**15th June 2022**

Hon. Elijah Muchima, Minister of Lands and Resources and Acting Minister of Education, our Guest of Honour,

Hon. Makozo Chikote, Minister of Fisheries and Livestock,

Hon. Felix Mutati, Minister of Technology and Science,

H.E. Col. Panji Kaunda, High Commissioner-designate of Zambia to Malawi, representing the late First Republican President H.E. Dr. Kenneth Kaunda,

Prof. Annie Sikwibele, Acting Vice Chancellor, UNZA

Prof. King Nalubamba, Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine, UNZA,

Permanent Secretaries and High-ranking Officials of the Government of the Republic of Zambia as well as Professors and Lecturers of UNZA,

Prof. Kusakabe, Head of Hokkaido University Lusaka Office,

Students of the UNZA School of Veterinary Medicine,

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Opening remarks)

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all today at my Residence for the Conferment Ceremony of Japanese Foreign Minister’s Commendation in honour of the School of Veterinary Medicine of UNZA. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Guest of Honour, Hon. Elijah Muchima, Minister of Lands and Resources and Acting Minister of Education; Hon. Ministers Felix Mutati & Makozo Chikote; Permanent Secretaries and other high-ranking invited Guests, for accepting my invitation to be here with us, despite heavily loaded schedules. My special thanks and tribute go to Col. Panji Kaunda, representing the family of the late First Republican President H.E. Dr. Kenneth Kaunda or KK, whose role as Head of State at that time was instrumental for the establishment of the School of Veterinary Medicine at UNZA. Without KK’s strong aspiration for the betterment of Zambia and effective lobbying to Japan, to put it simple, we might not have been able to be gathered here today.

I would like also to recognise the presence of the Acting Vice President of the UNZA, Prof. Annie Sikwibele; Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine, Prof. King Nalubamba; Professors and Lecturers from UNZA. Let me also welcome the students from the School of Veterinary Medicine on this auspicious occasion.

(Japanese Foreign Minister’s Commendation)

Japanese Foreign Minister’s Commendations are awarded to individuals and groups with outstanding achievements in international fields, in order to acknowledge their contributions to the promotion of friendship between Japan and respective countries. UNZA Veterinary School, being the flagship project and symbol of Japan-Zambian cooperation, received this award already in 2020, together with other 172 individuals and 65 groups from all over the world. However, the ceremony to confer the award on the School has been postponed till today, due to the COVID-19 world-wide.

While I feel extremely sorry for the delay thus caused and for having kept all those concerned waiting for such a long time, I am doubly or triply delighted that finally the day has come for me to convey the Certificate of the Foreign Minister’s Commendation to the UNZA School of Veterinary Medicine today, with the presence of so many prominent persons in Zambia and Japan.

Honourable Ministers, Acting Vice Chancellor, Dean of the UNZA School of Veterinary Medicine, Col. Kaunda, everyone here at my Residence,

 Let me hereby express my heartfelt congratulations to you all. Omedeto-Gozaimasu!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(History)

As you may be all aware, the establishment of the UNZA Veterinary School dates back to 1983, when Their Imperial Highnesses, the Crown Prince and Princess of Japan, today Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita, visited Zambia as State Guests reciprocating the State Visit by President Kaunda in 1980.

I was told that the First Republican President explained to the Crown Prince and Princess that it was the keen desire of the young Republic, with livestock being the main source of income for the majority of people and maintenance of health of cattle, goats or other animals at large being the key to people’s livelihood, to have an academic institution to build up and train veterinary doctors of its own. At that time, only the Whites were allowed to become full-fledged veterinary doctors and Zambians had to be satisfied if they were allowed to become assistant doctors.

This conversation during the Imperial Visit reached the policy makers of the Government of Japan, who, in turn, decided that Japan must support Zambia in this grand plan for the establishment of the Veterinary School at UNZA and its development.

The Japanese assistance started from the construction of the infrastructure for the Veterinary School lasting three years, and this was backed up by the Technical Assistance Scheme of JICA. The most significant portion of the cooperation, however, rested with the fact that Hokkaido University was selected to partner with UNZA. Hokkaido University, or Hokudai, as is more commonly known in Japan, dispatched more than 200 long-term and short-term researchers in total, providing on-site training of Zambian experts or joint research; most, but not all, of them in the capacity of JICA-experts. Many researchers came to Zambia also with other research cooperation schemes such as Japanese Ministry of Education’s research promotion funds, or even using Hokudai’s own budget. Further, Hokudai Veterinary Research Post-Graduate Course served as a steady base for young Zambian veterinary students, doctors and professors for further upgrading their carriers, receiving doctorates or professorships at the Hokudai Campus in Sapporo.

(Joint research and achievements)

Many remarkable joint studies were conducted between the two universities, partly with a view to strengthening the research capacity of UNZA Veterinary School, but all resulting in epoch-making discoveries or findings, mainly in the area of zoonotic diseases, but also in inter-disciplinary studies such as on the “causes and mechanism of high-density lead contamination in human bodies in Kabwe District (Central Province) and the proposals for the remedy of the problem”. In 2013, as part of its detecting capability of veterinary-related diseases, the School identified African swine fever as the cause of mass swine deaths in Lusaka that year.

These achievements led to the establishment of the Biosafety Level 3 Laboratory (BSL-3 Lab) at the School in 2010 and accreditation of the BSL-3 Lab as the “only Zambian institution capable of carrying out Ebola virus testing” by the Zambian Government in 2014, followed by the accreditation of the Lab as the “Africa Centre of Excellence for Infectious Diseases of Humans and Animals” by the World Bank in 2018. During the COVID time, it was designated as one of the testing stations for COVID-19 in Zambia. Early January this year, the Lab became the first institution in Zambia to detect the Omicron variant.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Future cooperation)

On the occasion of the UNZA-Hokudai Joint Symposium on Zoonostic Diseases held in February 2020, a visiting Professor of Hokudai told me that he sees in the UNZA School of Veterinary Medicine the “clone of Hokudai Veterinary Medicine Research”, after more than 30 years of cooperation. The transplantation of the genes of Hokudai into UNZA has thus been successfully completed. Today, the cooperation has entered the second generation, with sons and daughters of the very first cooperation conducting the joint reaearch today.

However, our cooperation will not stop here.

During the Official Working Visit by the former President Edgar Chagwa Lungu in 2018, the two Governments signed and exchanged Notes on a project for the renewal of some of the outdated medical equipment at UNZA School of Veterinary Medicine, mounting to 500 million JPY. This will be followed by a JICA technical cooperation project titled “Clinical Studies Enhancement Project for School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Zambia” totaling USD 1.6 million. I am very much looking forward to the official handover ceremony of the equipment currently being procured.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Concluding remarks)

Today’s conferment of the Foreign Minister’s Commendation on the UNZA School of Veterinary Medicine is a clear manifestation of the value the Japanese Government attaches to UNZA School of Veterinary Medicine and our fruitful cooperation. However, let me remind you of the necessity to ensure that the cooperation will be further augmented in the future as well.

What do I mean by that? It means I expect that the axis of UNZA-Hokudai “veterinary cooperation” should be further deepened – vertically. However, this cooperation must be expanded – horizontally – to embrace other areas, other Faculties and Schools as well. That kind of comprehensive cooperation should be the future target of the inter-university cooperation between the two. I am happy to announce, for example, that for this year’s SATREPS scheme, Hokudai Agriculture Faculty has been designated to conduct research on the improvement of rice species in Zambia. UNZA School of Agriculture should therefore be encouraged to join that research project. Efforts of this kind should be further explored.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is in this spirit that I conclude my remarks and I would like to invite Col. Kaunda to take the floor. Last but not least, let me express my hope that our bonds of friendship will flourish forever. May you all be blessed for your continued health, prosperity and success.

Thank you for your attention!