

Remarks by H.E. Mr. MIZUUCHI Ryuta, Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Zambia on the Occasion of Japan's National Day/62nd Birthday of H.M. the Emperor of Japan

Honourable Mr. Charles Milupi, Minister of Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development,

Honourable Mr. Mike Mposha, Minister of Water Development and Sanitation, Dr. Bwalya Ng'andu, Former Minister of Finance and Her Worship Ms. Chilando Chitangala, Mayor of Lusaka,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

High-ranking officials from the Government of Zambia,

Distinguished guests from media, academia, business, sport and Japanese community,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I am filled with relief – and joy – to be able to physically host our National Day reception at my Residence, albeit in a remarkably limited setup, after a long break – a period in which the life of all of us has been greatly overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is in this sense that I wish to welcome you all with us today.

Having said that, I thank you all for joining us in the celebration of the 62nd birthday of H.M. the Emperor of Japan.

In addition to today being the 62nd Birthday of H.M. the Emperor, we have one more reason to celebrate. On 23rd February 1581, precisely 441 years ago today, a man from Africa, having travelled to Japan with a Jesuit missionary, was received in audience by the then ruler of Japan, ODA Nobunaga, and became the “First African Samurai”, as he was given a Japanese name “Yasuke” and joined the rank of Nobunaga. Last year was the 440th commemoration of this historical event.

On our last Emperor's birthday reception two years ago, it was my greatest honour to have the late First Republican President, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda among our guests. Today, I miss him as much as you do. And as if in his stead, the Zambian voters chose a new Government under the Presidency of H.E. Mr. Hakainde Hichilema at the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections held on 12th August last year. For diplomats like me, nothing is more

impressive and exciting than to witness such epoch-making events in a country where they are serving. Indeed, it was amazing to see how a peaceful transfer of power was completed, fully in accordance with the democratic values and practices. I take this opportunity to commend all Zambians – winners and losers alike – for having made this come true.

But democracy is not static. It is a process, an evolution. Therefore, we are here also to observe what changes this transfer of power will bring to the Zambian people in the years to come. When I met with President Hichilema even before he was inaugurated, I told him that the biggest challenge he would face in his new government would be the debt issue. Not only will he lack the necessary financial resources to run the government. It is also standing in the way of engaging foreign investors and traders in doing business in Zambia, including Japanese – in contravention to his pure desire to realise a revitalisation of economy, as well as to introduce the “Japanese business culture” into Zambia.

I told him further that in facing the pressure of external creditors, he should continue coordinating with the international community, in particular, within the framework of G20, since that would be the source of strength that the President would be able to rely on. Reaching the Staff-Level Agreement (SLA) with IMF was a great achievement in this regard. As Zambia still strives its path towards reaching the Extended Credit Facility from IMF, Japan stands ready to extend whatever support is needed within the so-called Common Framework and beyond.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regarding Japan’s cooperation with Zambia in its efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), I have made clear that the change of government itself will not affect our basic position, meaning that we will continue to support the policy goals and financial needs of the new Government. However, we are mindful of the shift of priorities. One such example is the change of supervising bodies over the KAIZEN Institute of Zambia – from the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. While I was wondering what the background

of this change was, one day Minister of Tourism, Hon. Rodney Sikumba told me something interesting. He said that within the government a discussion is going on that government institutions themselves may require application of KAIZEN methodologies.

Under these circumstances, let me present to you some of the important strategic undertakings by the Japanese Government in the coming years, some of which I explained to Hon. Mr. Milupi back in October last year when I paid a call on him.

First, the new Master Plan for the Greater Lusaka Metropolis:

You will all agree that the population of Zambia's Capital has grown more rapidly than the city itself can absorb. The results are overpopulation of compounds, traffic congestions, and lack of proper sewage and waste management system affecting water and other human environment, etc. Thus, we have reached an understanding that a new Master Plan would be needed to replace the older one that JICA produced in 2009. Currently, it is in the pipeline, in close consultation with Lusaka City Council, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and other stakeholders. The engagement of interested private sector would also be of significance since financial resources solely from the state budget and from cooperating partners including Japan would not be sufficient to cover all the projects which will be identified by the new Master Plan.

Second, the new Luangwa Bridge on the Great East Road:

I must confess that on the Japanese side we are still awaiting the finalisation of the detailed design and the approval by the government. Nevertheless, we welcome the decision by the Zambian cabinet to work with Japan to construct the New Luangwa Bridge, replacing the older one over the Luangwa River. This will not only improve the connection between Lusaka and the Eastern Province but has the regional and global dimensions. This corridor brings Zambia much closer to the Indian Ocean and beyond... even to Japan over what we call the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).

Third, long-term technical cooperation in various sectors:

For the last two years, we did a lot to support Zambia's healthcare sector. The outspoken aim was the fight against COVID-19. However, the long-term target was to strengthen the Zambian healthcare system itself. Pandemics come and go, but the system strengthened and human resources well-trained will ensure that the diseases will be managed properly. In this spirit, ZNPFI and the Level 1 & 2 Hospitals upgraded from Health Centres by Japan's Grant will be receiving experts and equipment.

Another area we will focus will be education. I am reading press reports saying that the free education policy announced by the new Government is already becoming a game-changer and that public schools are attracting the attention of many parents whose children are going to private schools. Japan has been working on the reform of school curricula and textbooks, supporting the National Science Centre. The next target is to augment the STEM education which the new government urgently needs to ensure the basis of engineering and manufacturing, basic and advanced scientific research in physics, chemistry or mining, not to mention veterinary medicine. In this regard, there is one thing I wish to call upon the new Government to consider: to officially commission the newly built STEM Education Centre as soon as possible. Quite sadly, it became the first victim of COVID on the day it was supposed to be commissioned and has remained left behind ever since.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Japan at New Year, people are allowed to dream sweet dreams. And such dreams as those containing Mt. Fuji or a flying hawk are regarded as bringing good luck for the rest of the year. My sweet dream for this year is to see expanded exchanges between people and people. Last year, on the margins of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, the so-called Hometowns for the Zambian Olympic and Paralympic Contingent not only offered logistical support, but also became motivated to do more for Zambia. For example, Asahi-City donated PPEs to Levy Mwanawasa Hospital right in time in preparation for the fourth wave of COVID. There took place exchanges via the internet between pupils of a junior high school in Japan and the

secondary education in Zambia. I am also aware of some interest towards a twin-city partnership in Japan by the Mayor of Lusaka, Her Worship Madame Chilando Chitangala, or the Former Minister of the Central Province, Hon. Sydney Mushanga.

Let us all hope, as COVID-19 starts to subside, as it looks like now, that such exchanges will grow, and blow off the shadows of the pandemic over the last two years. Japan, too, is slowly opening for foreign visitors, starting from 1st March, as Prime Minister Kishida announced a week ago. Thank God, we have no more mandatory hotel quarantine for travellers from Zambia!

And 2022 is also the year of 8th Tokyo International Conference on African Development, also known as TICAD8. It is supposed to be held in Tunisia in August – another occasion where Japan and Africa meet and confess their love to each other. President Hichilema should (and will be able to) take that opportunity to convince Prime Minister Kishida of Zambia's strong will to engage Japanese business and overcome problems such as corruption and debt.

Honourable Minister, distinguished guests,

Before I conclude, let me share with you the Waka (Japanese traditional short poem) made by H.M. the Emperor of Japan on the occasion of the Annual New Year Poetry Reading of the Imperial Family, which would read in English as follows:

Our life of these days
Remains hard and restrained
So does world's traffic
I pray wholeheartedly for
Windows to open.

It goes without saying what the Emperor intended to express. Without doubt, it reflects the quest of everyone in the world towards the post-COVID era. Therefore, I would like to make today's reception an event of good hope for tomorrow and let it proceed in this spirit. I wish you all an enjoyable afternoon, with windows of opportunities starting to open today.

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Thank you very much for your attention.