

**Remarks by H.E. Ambassador TAKEUCHI Kazuyuki
at the Japanese Language Contest
24th February 2024**

Dr. Martin Mushumba, Acting Director General, Higher Education
Authority of the Republic of Zambia,
Prof. Norifumi Miyokawa and Study Abroad Coordinators, Hokkaido
University Africa Lusaka Office,
Dr. Sande Ngalande, Lecturer, School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
University of Zambia,
Distinguished graduates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to join you at the first ever Japanese Language Contest being held today. To begin with, I would like to express my gratitude to all those involved in organising this contest and my special thanks go to Hokkaido University Africa Lusaka Office and its Coordinator Dr. Kusakabe and Dr. Sande Ngalande for their ardent support and mentoring for the Japanese Language Course at the University of Zambia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year Japan and Zambia celebrate the 60th Anniversary of their diplomatic relations. Zambia shares with Japan fundamental values such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The continuous support that Japan has provided since Zambia's independence is so deeply embedded in Zambian life that it's rarely recognised. This anniversary is an opportunity to visibly highlight Japan's contribution, emphasise the uniqueness of Japan's support and communicate that Japan will continue to be an irreplaceable partner to Zambia.

Distinguished Guests,

As I understand, the UNZA Zambia Japanese Language Course was established in 2013 with the support of the Hokkaido University Africa Lusaka Office. One year later, Japanese was recognised as an official foreign language at UNZA alongside French and Chinese. Other stakeholders such as Toshiba in South Africa and the Japan Foundation have supported the Japanese course by providing PCs, Japanese language textbooks and instruction materials. A much-needed JICA volunteer was dispatched as a Japanese language teacher in 2019. At the time everyone was expecting the Japanese Language Course to expand further, COVID-19 struck all over the world. She had to be repatriated along with all the other volunteers working in Zambia. It was the beginning of the hardship for all of us. The course itself had to be temporarily closed and was only able to reopen two years later in 2021, thanks to the great efforts of Dr. Ngalande, Dr. and Mrs. Kusakabe and all the others. I would also like to highlight the contribution of the staff of Hokkaido University Africa Lusaka Office and the Japanese students, who were instrumental in the reopening and sustaining the Course. I thank you all for your commitment. (Please applause!)

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Graduates,

I am sure that you all share with me the desire to further promote the Japanese language in Zambia. Don't you?

As we deepen our bilateral cooperation between Japan and Zambia, we should also promote contact and understanding at the people-to-people level. And the younger generation should be encouraged to engage more intensively with Japan. I have seen that at the LsCon 2023, many Zambians are eager to come closer to Japan and Japanese culture through Anime, Manga and other modern and traditional cultural heritage. I think that we can and should build on this trend. Thus, this year, as we celebrate our 60th Anniversary with Zambia, our Embassy has decided to organise many activities to engage the young generation, such as the Japanese Language Contest to encourage young, motivated Zambians to appreciate the language and perhaps go to Japan as scholarship students under various programmes offered by the Japanese government or individual universities.

In addition, consideration can be given to the introduction of Japanese lessons through online courses or websites developed for the Japanese Language Course.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Graduates,

It is high time to think about the next step. Therefore, I urge all of you today to become pioneers of Japanese language and culture in our institutions, homes and communities. I would be happy to support such a move. I am sure that the University of Zambia and Hokkaido University would also give us the necessary support in this direction.

With these remarks, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to extend my best wishes to all of you and participants in the contest. And I wish you all great success.

Thank you for your attention!