

**Remarks by H. E. TAKEUCHI Kazuyuki, Ambassador of Japan to the
Republic of Zambia, at the Handover Ceremony of the Project for the
Provision of School Furniture for Public Schools in Chingola, Copperbelt
Province
Friday, 26th July 2024**

Honourable Chipoka Mulenga, Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, in his capacity as Area Member of Parliament for Chingola Central Constituency

Dr. Blessings Kasenge, the Programs Manager, BeRelevant Afrika

Mr. Noah Samulunga, Chingola District Education Board Secretary

Mr. Felix Chomba, Head Teacher, Muchinshi Secondary School, and All Head Teachers from other schools present

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure to be here with you today on the occasion of the handover ceremony of “the Project for the Provision of School Furniture for Public Schools in Chingola, Copperbelt Province”. This project is funded by Japan’s Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Project (GGP) and implemented by BeRelevant Afrika, NGO based in Chingola District.

Let me firstly extend my sincere appreciation to the Guest of Honour, Honourable Chipoka Mulenga, Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry for his presence today in his capacity as Member of Parliament for the Chigola Central Constituency. My gratitude also goes to all those involved in this project for their hard work in making today’s handover a reality, as well as to all of distinguished guests here as witnesses to the completion of the project. With the total budget of 21,750 US dollars made available by the Grant Contract signed in March 2024, 290 desks have been provided to eight public schools in Chingola.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you all know, the free education policy introduced by the New Dawn Government of Honourable President Hichilema has had a significant impact on the country since its introduction in 2021. Before that, many children were unable to attend school due to their families’ financial strain. However, the new policy has allowed more than two million children to go to school.

In Chingola as well, many children have returned to school. I heard that the number of students at these eight public schools has doubled for the past two years. While this is really pleasant news, the demand for desks also rises as the number of children enrolling in schools increases. This has led to a significant shortage of desks in numerous schools. This is where BeRelevant Afrika came to the Government of Japan to seek support. As we cannot emphasise enough the importance of education and the appropriate environment for education, the Embassy came to decide to extend a grant for their project. As a result, BeRelevant Afrika provided a total of 290 desks to eight schools, including three in the peri-urban area.

During the project inspection, the Embassy team observed that the donated desks brought about a positive impact on the children's learning environment at these schools. A number of schools reported with excitement that some classes no longer require students to sit on the floor during lessons. Furthermore, I was also informed that at one of the schools, parents of grade 1 students even came to see their children studying on the desks for the very first time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the signing ceremony in March, Honourable Minister of Education stated that the shortage of desks was not a bad problem, but rather a positive consequence of the government's effort to increase educational opportunity. The free education policy has opened doors to more than two million children across the country. Meanwhile, the shortage of desks has become a serious issue that needs to be addressed urgently. What pleases me at today's handover is that the Government of Japan, through this project, will be able to work jointly with the effort of Zambian Government to provide all the children with wider access to education and to enhance their learning environment.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. The Government of Japan has consistently prioritised education as a key area of development cooperation for Zambia and our priority has never changed for over six decades. In this context, I believe that this project symbolises our commitment to education and also demonstrates our close friendship between Japan and Zambia. We are always and will be here for you to work together in order to create a brighter future for Zambia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

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Let us continue to help each other and continue to work together. My greatest wish today is that the children at these eight schools will study even harder with these desks and become future leaders of Zambia, and eventually they will join this close friendship between the two countries.

Thank you for your attention.

(End)