

**Speech by H.E. Mr. Kazuya OGAWA, Ambassador of Japan,
on the Occasion of the Birthday Celebration of His Majesty
the Emperor of Japan on 16th December, 2014**

Honorable Germaine Kamayirese, Minister of State in charge of Energy and Water;

Honorable Ministers and Members of Parliament;

Your Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners;

Distinguished Representatives of International Organizations;

Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen,

Murakaza neza.

First of all, I would like to thank all of you here tonight for joining our National Day reception to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty Emperor Akihito who turns 81 years old this year.

As we are almost approaching the end of the year 2014, I would like to look back on this year's activities.

On a point of view of bilateral exchange, we have received several guests from Japan to Rwanda this year. First, H.E. Mr. Hiroshi Yamamoto, Parliamentary Secretary for Finance visited Kigali for attending the Annual Meetings of the Boards of Governors of the African Development Bank and the African Development Fund in May. Mr. Asahiko Mihara and Dr. Daishiro Yamagiwa, Members of House of Representative and the Japan-AU Parliamentary Friendship League visited in August. Both of those visitors met Rwandan high leaderships and exchanged views on the relationship between Japan and Rwanda during their stay in Kigali. They also visited several Japanese ODA project sites as well as Kigali Genocide Memorial

Center.

In June, Hon. Valentine Rugwabiza, then CEO of Rwanda Development Board, visited Japan for attending the “Rwanda Business and Investment Seminar” organized by the Embassy of Rwanda in Japan and Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), and she delivered a Keynote Address. The subtitle of this seminar is “Exploring business opportunities in Rwanda, a rising Star in Africa”. I also attended the seminar and was nicely quite surprised that there were many Japanese businessmen interested in doing business in this country. I am glad to see that business opportunities in Rwanda are bringing heightened attention from Japan these days.

Then, a large group of the Public and Private Sector Joint Mission for Promoting Trade and Investment headed by H.E. Mr. Hirotaka Ishihara, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, visited Kigali at the end of August. Dispatching this Mission is one of the policies for promoting trade and investment between Japan and Africa, which was stated at the TICAD IV in 2008, and this was actually the 8th Mission. For Rwanda, a total of 47 members from 14 Private companies, independent administrative institutions and government agencies participated. During their visit, the Mission exchanged views with Rwandan high leaderships, especially H.E. Mr. Paul Kagame, the President of the Republic. Thanks to the effort by the Rwandan Government, the Mission also had a meeting with several Ministers and joined a Seminar for Promoting Trade and Investment arranged by RDB with many private companies on the Rwandan side. I sincerely hope that this Mission will be associated with the successful of more business relationship between Japan and Rwanda.

Currently, there are only few companies run by Japanese in Rwanda. Rwanda Nut Company is one of them. Tonight, I invited the company to this

reception to demonstrate their products. I believe many of you already recognized those tasty macadamia nut products because they are selling at Nukmat for example and many other stores in Kigali, but please try some at the table over there. I am their number one fan actually.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, the Embassy organized several cultural events. In June, we had a cultural event called “Japanese evening”. Mrs. Sakamoto, who just performed the national anthems tonight, sang Japanese and some other language songs with Japanese pianist at the event. She had a concert at Serena Hotel few days ago and I guess some of you also enjoyed it. I think we are so lucky having her here in Rwanda. Anyway, at the event, we also introduced Japanese cuisine “Washoku” and Japanese rice wine “Sake”. “Washoku” is a traditional Japanese cuisine and was designated by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in December last year. Both “Washoku” and “Sake” are gaining popularity in the world these days. If there is someone who has not tried them yet, we are glad to offer you some tonight so please try and enjoy them.

In August, the Embassy together with Rwanda Karate Federation organized the first “Karate-do Japan Ambassador Cup” in Kigali. Karate is a martial art developed in Japan and has more than 500 years history. In Rwanda, it is actually one of the popular sports and many young Rwandan Karate players joined this event. I watched their match, which was very exciting, and was very impressed by their seriousness indeed.

We also arranged several events for introducing Japanese tradition, culture and education with JICA Alumni Association of Rwanda (JAAR) at local schools. I hope these events make more Rwanda people familiar with

Japan and more young students interested in studying in Japan. JAAR is an association which consists of members who joined training courses in Japan by JICA. I think there are some members here tonight and I would like to say that I am happy to see those members helping us to bolster up our bilateral relationship in many ways.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to mention about our economic cooperation, too. First of all, I am very happy that “the Project for Construction of Rusumo International Bridge and One Stop Border Post Facilities”, our grant aid project which started in March 2012, was completed very recently. The Rusumo International Bridge over Akagera River is on the Central Corridor connecting the important port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania with Kigali. The new two-lane Bridge was opened last August. Before, it took a long time to cross the old one-span bridge but now, many heavy trucks pass smoothly. It plays a significant role in regional logistics not only for Rwanda but also for other countries in the East African Community (EAC) and beyond.

We also signed the Exchange of Notes for a new Grant aid project named “the Project for Development of Irrigation Scheme in Ngoma District” in August. Japan is one of key developing partners in agricultural sector for Rwanda. This new grant is aiming at helping to improve and stabilize agriculture productivity in Ngoma District through such activities as the construction of a water reservoir and irrigation facilities, and will enable farmers to utilize agricultural water more efficiently and promote intensive agriculture in the area.

I am sure that the Japanese assistance, which covers a broad range of areas, contributes to the economic and social development of Rwanda. For

example, we have a scheme called the Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects (GGP). The Embassy has been supporting GGP across the country every year since 1998, and a total number of 78 projects have been funded to local and international NGOs, local public authorities and so on. There is other scheme called Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects. Here in Rwanda, a Japanese NPO “Reborn Kyoto” is conducting a project titled “Life Empowerment Project Through Acquiring High Level Cloth Fabrication Skills” in Kigali since July last year. This is a three-year project and now in phase 2. In phase 1 and 2, the project trains around 50 Rwandan people in each phase, and will create a Production Unit next year in phase 3. Outcome of this project is not only training skilled people but also producing business through production and selling. I hope the project will make a contribution to fostering industry in Rwanda in the future. “Reborn Kyoto” is displaying some clothes made by trainees here tonight so please have a look of them.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, there were so many progresses between Japan and Rwanda, I may say. Next year, I will continue doing my best to further strengthen the already existing friendly relationship between our two countries working hand in hand with all of you here.

Now, I will round off my speech before getting too long. Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to propose a toast to the good health of His Majesty Emperor Akihito and His Excellency President Paul Kagame, as well as to the happiness of all of you here tonight.

Thank you for your attention.

Murakoze cyane.

