

SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION OF HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR OF JAPAN ON 26TH NOVEMBER 2015

Honorable Minister of State in charge of Agriculture, Mr. Nsanganira,
Honorable Members of Parliament,
Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Representatives of International Organizations,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:
Mwiriwe,

My name is Tomio SAKAMOTO and I am Charge d' Affaires at the Embassy. I would like to thank you all for joining us today to celebrate the birthday of our Emperor, His Majesty Akihito who turns 82 years old this year. In fact, His Majesty's birthday falls on 23rd December but since this date coincides with Christmas holidays for many of you, we have decided to celebrate it in advance. I must also apologize for the absence of Ambassador OTA who wished so much to be here with us tonight but unfortunately has to stay in Japan for medical attention and treatment.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Please allow me to briefly touch upon the system and history of our imperial family for those of you who are not familiar with it.

Ancient Japanese literature records that the origin of our imperial family dates back to 660BC. From the first Emperor, called Jinmu-Tennou, His Majesty Akihito is the 125th Emperor. The oldest archaeological evidences of the roots of our imperial family are found in the artifacts of around 3rd century in the western part of Japan. During medieval and early modern periods, while the Emperor stayed in Kyoto, the political power became to be dominated gradually by samurai, feudal warriors, and it was after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 that the Emperor moved to Tokyo. Following the process of modernisation in the late 19th century, the imperial family came back to the centre of politics again, as the Emperor came to be regarded as the basis of legitimacy of the nation against the samurai regime. After the Second World War, the Emperor was turned into the symbol of Japan under our current constitution, and since then, has been cherished by all Japanese people who appreciate our culture and tradition. I hope it is clear now that our nation is not a republic but a constitutional monarchy.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Our economic cooperation in Rwanda has been successful and continued to register good results. Japan supports Rwanda in economic infrastructure development; promotion of market oriented and value added agriculture; assistance in water and

sanitation including development of operation and maintenance systems, particularly targeting Eastern Province where the coverage of water supply is the lowest in the country; as well as science and technology education and training.

Among these projects, some are worth mentioning. “The Project for the Construction of Rusumo International Bridge and One Stop Border Post Facilities”, through our grant aid project which started in March 2012, was completed last year. 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 two-lane Bridge was opened in August 2013. Before, it took a long time to cross the old one but now, many heavy trucks pass smoothly. This bridge 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 are also in the process of providing ODA loan or Japanese Yen Loan to Rwanda. This would be the first time for the Government of Japan to resume providing ODA loan to Rwanda after 26 years. The Loan would be provided jointly with African Development Bank, and the fund will be used to rehabilitate the Rusumo-Kayonza road.

As the lead donor in the Water and Sanitation Sector, Japan continues to provide assistance to Rwanda to help achieve the country’s national target of universal access to clean water by 2017. The Exchange of Notes for a new Grant aid project named “the Project for Rural Water Supply (Phase III)” was signed in March this year. This Grant aid targets three sectors in three districts in the Eastern Province, namely Rukira Sector of Ngoma District, Murama Sector of Kayonza District, and Remera Sector of Gatsibo District. The fund will be used in such activities as constructing piped water supply systems and capacity building of operation staff and technicians. Upon completion of the project, more than 33 thousand residents in the targeted areas will have access to clean and safe drinking water.

Moreover, Japan regards developing the agriculture sector as essential for Rwanda, and in line with this, we have signed the Exchange of Notes for a new Grant aid project named “the Project for Development of Irrigation Scheme in Ngoma District” in August 2014. This grant aims 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. The construction work started in June this year and it would be completed in August next year, 2016.

I am sure that Japan's assistance, which covers a broad range of sectors as I mentioned before, contributes to the economic and social development of Rwanda. In addition, 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 many projects have been implemented through local and international NGOs, local public authorities and so on.

The Government of Japan has been backing peace and social stability of Africa through TICAD process. TICAD stands for the Tokyo International Conference on African Development. During the course of the TICAD process, the "Consolidation of Peace" was adopted as one of the important policy pillars of Japan's assistance to Africa. Japan appreciates Rwanda's continuous contribution and efforts for peace and security in the region. In this regard, Japan has extended support to the Rwanda Peace Academy, RPA, through UNDP. This year, Japan extended 537 thousand USD to the academy, and the fund would be utilized for such activities as conducting training courses mainly for member states of Eastern Africa Standby Force including Rwanda, developing a Five Year Strategic Plan for RPA, and enhancing capacity of RPA to conduct research.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, JICA Rwanda Office will celebrate 10 years since it reopened its doors here in Kigali in 2005. Many of the projects have been realized through JICA before the Embassy opened here in Kigali in 2010. We wish to thank the team of JICA for their dedication in Rwanda's development this past decade.

Now, let me propose a toast for our friendship and for the health and happiness of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan and the President of the Republic of Rwanda as well as the people of Rwanda, and all of us present here today.

Kampai! Cheers!