

**Speech by H.E. Mr. Isao FUKUSHIMA,
Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Rwanda,
at the Birthday Celebration of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito
Friday, February 23, 2024**

Honorable Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
International Cooperation,

Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Distinguished Representatives of International Organizations,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening, Today marks the 64th birthday of His
Majesty Emperor Naruhito, and it is my great honor to celebrate
his birthday as the National Day of Japan, in Your presence.

In the press conference today, His Majesty Emperor delivered a message. On this occasion for celebration, however, His Majesty expressed His sympathy to the people affected by the earthquake which hit the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture on the very New Year's Day. Following His Majesty's example, let me say some words on this disaster.

By the earthquake and in the following difficult living conditions, 250 people are reported dead or missing, about 9000 houses completely destroyed. 13000 people are still displaced, and 30000 households are deprived of running water.

On behalf of the Government and people of Japan, let me take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to you all, to the Government of Rwanda in particular, for messages of heartfelt sympathy and of encouragement.

Honorable Permanent Secretary,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the last year's National Day, when I had just presented my credentials to His Excellency President Kagame weeks earlier, I expressed my commitment to work hard for strengthening the bilateral ties with Rwanda. Please let me introduce some achievements made not on my own but in collaboration of all the partners and my colleagues.

First and foremost, I had lots of chances to have frank talks with leadership of Rwandan Government and other institutions. I have been impressed by their fresh open-mindedness, high motivation and spontaneity of young leadership.

Coming from a country where we are facing an aging society, I must confess that I felt sometimes myself very old man and jealous of their promising future.

Over the course of these talks, the young leaders expressed me their determination not only to achieve the ambitious targets of economic development of Rwanda, but also to take the lead in the international efforts to cope with regional and global challenges. In this context, I can only express my complete admiration for the initiatives of Rwanda to host high-level conferences, Women Deliver and WTTC Summit among others in one year, aiming at confronting these challenges.

It would not be too much to ask to hope that Rwanda will play further positive and constructive role in tackling the challenges for peace, stability and prosperity of the Great Lake Region.

Now, let me turn to our economic tie.

In last decade, more than 20 Japanese-related companies have actively operated especially in agricultural sector. And it might be worth noting today that since the post-covid recovery, a number of Japanese major companies of ICT get interested in starting up business in Rwanda and some of them consider dispatching their resident representatives to Kigali.

They have unanimously told me that the decisive factor has been relentless efforts of the Government of Rwanda, of RDB in particular, to implement innovative policies to attract foreign companies and investors by creating sound business environment, such as One Stop Center.

I'd like now to speak about our development assistance to Rwanda.

In one year, I traveled every corner of this country to see the achievements of Japan's cooperation with Rwanda since more than half a century and I renewed my conviction that Japan's development assistance policy has been right in its philosophy based upon "Human Security", human-centered cooperation and that we shall stay close to the needs of the people.

My second finding after a number of trips in the regions is that while Rwanda has achieved a remarkable growth as we see in Kigali, there remains a lot to be done in the sectors of basic infrastructure or education, especially in rural areas.

Time will not allow me to elaborate on details of all the projects Japan has done, but please let me introduce main progresses we have made in three policy areas, namely, traffic infrastructure, water and sanitation, and education.

The first is the traffic infrastructure. Last October, I signed the Exchange of Notes with Honorable Minister Dr. NDAGIJIMANA for a grant aid with the amount of 14.6 million US dollars, aiming at improving traffic flow and safety in Kigali by installation of a traffic and signal control system. You might have had a look at an introductory video clip on the screen.

In addition to that, last December, I attended the Ceremony for the Completion of Kagitumba-Kayonza-Rusumo Road Improvement Project with my colleague Ambassador of the European Union and representative of AfDB. This is our joint effort with a view to the smooth traffic flow and safety on this most important trunk road linking Tanzanian and Ugandan borders.

These projects not only improve the traffic infrastructures, but also put Rwanda on the road to prosperity and stable growth as a “Land-Linked Country” not as a land-locked one.

Second area is water and sanitization, one of the most basic human needs. Japan has accumulated substantial experience and expertise which are incorporated into the projects in water sector. Now, allow me to share with you that the completion ceremony for “Project for Strengthening Nzove-Ntora Principal Water Transmission Pipeline” will take place shortly. In this project, we installed the largest pipeline in Rwanda, making it possible to provide much better access to running water for City of Kigali and its suburbs. Many of you will be direct beneficiary.

Last one is education. Tonight, I am proud to announce that Japan will provide the Government of Rwanda with the development policy loan for education sector at an unprecedented scale of more than Ninety-three million US dollars. Education is the foundation of development and prosperity of a country, and indeed, it is education that give rise to people’s dignity as human beings. That is why equal access to education should be secured regardless of where they live.

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These are major examples of recent development in bilateral cooperation between Japan and Rwanda.

For these great achievements, JICA, specialists for development assistance, plays an essential role. Let me take this opportunity to say thank you to my JICA colleagues, skillful experts and volunteers for their daily hard work.

Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to our partners of International Organizations. Japan owes you our success to provide necessary support to refugees and other vulnerable people.

Closing my speech, let me say thank you to my colleagues of my Embassy for their efforts to make happen today's event with this beautiful installation.

Thank you all for your attention and for being with us tonight. I hope you will enjoy the well-known Japanese cuisine: sushi, tempura and Japanese sake.