

**Remarks by Mr. Takeshi Akamatsu,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan
to the Republic of South Sudan,
on the Occasion of the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan
10 December 2013**

Hon. Ms. Rebecca Joshua Okwachi, Minister of Telecommunication and Postal Services,
Hon. Mr. Kuol Manyang Juuk, Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs,
Hon. Mr. Kuong Danhier Gatluak, Minister of Transport, Roads and Bridges,
Hon. Mr. Ngor Kolong Ngor, Minister of Labour, Public Service and Human Resource Development,
Hon. Ms. Catherine Juan Benaiah, Minister of Lands, Housing and Physical Planning,
Ms. Hilde Johnson, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for South Sudan,

Colleagues from the diplomatic corps,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

Earlier this year, a young friend of mine who works at a renowned investment bank phoned me and said that he has decided to quit his job and to go to Harvard Business School for further studies. I praised his bold decision, and asked him what made him to take up the new challenge. He replied it was upon the words that his boss gave him. So what was the marvelous encouragement he got from his boss, I asked. And his reply;

“YOU ARE FIRED!”

And so it was with a bit of surprise, just a day after President Salva Kiir Mayradit declared to dissolve the entire cabinet, that I got a call from Tokyo and the voice said,

“YOU ARE FIRED....as Chargé des affaires...and now you continue as an Ambassador!”

So here I am, as the youngest ambassador among all Japanese diplomats, to the youngest nation in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Young and new as it is, South Sudan celebrated its second independence this July. And in South Sudan, history is in the making. We, at our office, which was just upgraded into an Embassy on 1st of July, are all excited to be part of that history.

Let me just briefly go over what kind of history it was;

We have witnessed, this year, dramatic changes in relations between South Sudan and Sudan; with several summit level meetings, relations have by far ameliorated, and oil is flowing again. South Sudan survived, against all odds.

Our praise goes to the people of South Sudan, who have all remarkably withstood difficult times during 20 months of austerity. They have again demonstrated resilience, which has now come to be known as their synonym since the days of their struggle to freedom.

And to President Salva Kiir Mayardit and political leaders in bringing continuous reform in this country; we hope they will continue to enhance transparency and accountability and rule of law, with more effective service delivery by the Government.

Japan, along with other international partners, will stand firm in support and encourage the endeavor of nation building in South Sudan, as well as for better relations between the two Sudans, as we believe that stronger relations between the two will bring stability and prosperity to both countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tonight we are celebrating the Eightieth Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, which is 23rd December 2013. But this year also coincides with 50th Anniversary of the foundation of Organization of African Unity, now AU, as well as 20th Anniversary of TICAD-Tokyo International Conference on African Development.

Our bilateral relations this year was highlighted by the first-ever visit to Japan by President Salva Kiir Mayardit, accompanied by a high level delegation, at the occasion of TICAD V, in June.

At TICAD V, under the theme "Hand in hand with more dynamic Africa", deliberations were focused more on the role of private sector in promotion of development. This was also one of the topics at the first-ever summit meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Mr. Shinzo Abe and President Salva Kiir Mayardit, turning a new phase in our bilateral relations.

So with the success of South Sudan Investment Conference, just a week ago, our approach to the development of South Sudan is in quite a harmony.

And from Japan, delegations continued to visit South Sudan; Vice ministers from both Cabinet Affairs Office and Defence Ministry of Japan, Parliamentarians, and the President of JICA, were among many others who made it to Juba, demonstrating high interest in boosting our bilateral relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As represented by these high level visits from both sides, our bilateral economic cooperation has also achieved significant progress this year, and projects have been duly implemented, albeit with some delays.

Construction work for grant aid project, “Improvement of Water Supply System in Juba” has started last October. And two others are on track; they are “Improvement of Juba River Port” and “Construction of Nile River Bridge”. Three projects totaling to around 200 million US dollars.

I am happy to announce here that the long awaited construction of “Nile River Bridge” will commence shortly in early January next year.

Rehabilitation of the Juba Na-Bari Community Road (Kololo Road) was completed and handed over to the community on 21 November. Jointly implemented with Central Equatoria State, this project was financed by the Embassy and undertaken by UNMISS Japan Contingent Engineer Company, with a technical support from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). In a so called “All-Japan” approach, we sought to maximize our capabilities in a synergy among Japanese players here in South Sudan.

However, these infrastructure projects should not overshadow our assistance in humanitarian sector. With small scale grassroots grant, support has been extended to various NGOs active in various states in South Sudan.

We have provided relief materials on bilateral basis to the returnees from Sudan, and just recently to the flood affected people. These are conducted in addition to our humanitarian assistance through international organizations that topped \$53 million this year.

On Rule of Law and Governance, Japan supports UNDP in the constitutional review process in South Sudan, keeping in mind the elections in 2015. And focusing on the elections, JICA is now helping to build up capacity of SSTV/R so that they could play a vital role in the cause of election year.

These are some of the ongoing projects that Japan is supporting in South Sudan and are part of our initiatives within the framework of TICAD, where the underlying message is “partnership” and “ownership”. Therefore we strongly support the initiative by South Sudan to commit itself to work better together with the international community.

This is why Japan has been supporting the formulation of the “New Deal Compact”, a mutual accountability framework for both the International Community and the Government of South Sudan, in order to maximize the impact on development. We strongly hope that the momentum created through the process of “New Deal Compact” would not be lost by postponement of its launch.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our commitment to South Sudan is not limited to economic assistance. As in the case of Na-Bari community Road project, presence of our Engineering Contingent under UNMISS is another proof of our support to the nation building and consolidation of peace in South Sudan.

From UNMISS, we have received Ms. Hilde Johnson, SRSG as well as Mr. Toby Lanzer, DSRSG, to Japan this year. During their stay, they both had extensive dialogue with government officials, politicians and through media and public affairs occasion to the people of Japan to convey the message of the importance of our continued support to the activities of UNMISS.

And it is through our extensive dialogue and through their encouragement, that Japan Engineering Contingent is expanding its activities to both East and West Equatoria States. A party of about 130 engineers will start working in Torit, even before Christmas.

As Japan has experienced devastations of its homeland, not only from natural disasters, but from the war, we have remained as a peace loving nation since 1945 and will remain so, committed to refraining from unilaterally escalating tension and to resolving international issues in a calm and peaceful manner. So the presence of our Self Defense Force Contingent here in South Sudan, only SDF dispatched for UN peacekeeping in the world, is in itself a message to the People of South Sudan in consolidation of peace in this country.

But they are not only peace loving peace keepers. They are also abundant source of hidden talents, and are interacting with the People of South Sudan through various voluntary activities from playing football with kids, to helping and cultivating friendship with Karate aficionados in South Sudan.

So tonight in addition to the Drum performance, which has now become a customary celebration scene in Juba, we will be having a short demonstration of Karate Performance by the members of the South Sudan Karate Association and Japan Contingent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some of you here today might remember my speech from last year. We regret we are still unable to provide SUSHI tonight.

South Sudan, in its third year after independence, it is facing many a challenge; and now you can see challenges at our Embassy, are also immense, who is barely five months old.

Therefore today, I am not making a promise for the future. But I am just blocking a few numbers from my mobile phone, so that I would not be hearing the three words that encouraged my friend and myself earlier this year, at least not too soon.

As the old saying goes, with a slight diplomatic twist, "keep your new wine and young ambassador in a brand new country".

I wish you all Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2014!

(FIN)