

Speech by Mr. Kikuta Yutaka, Ambassador of Japan to Nigeria,

At the National Day Reception

to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan

12 February, 2020

(Protocol)

1.(New Beginning)

(1)New Decade

At the outset, allow me to quote His Excellency President Muhammadu Buhari's New Year Day message by saying, "Today marks a new decade. It is a time of hope, optimism and fresh possibilities".

According to the oriental zodiac, 2020 is the year of the rat, the first of the repeating 12-year cycle of animals, which symbolizes a new beginning for a prosperous future.

(2)3 firsts

On the occasion of today's reception holding in this memorable year, let me introduce to you three "first-ers".

First, Japan entered into the new era "REIWA" last year. Today's National Day Reception is the first-ever to celebrate the birthday of the New Emperor of Japan. So, welcome everyone to this historic event!

Second, this afternoon, I presented to Senator Udoma Udo Udoma, former Minister of Budget and National Planning, the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star, one of the highest orders awarded in the name of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. Thus, Senator Udoma became the first-ever Nigerian to receive the Order of the Rising Sun from the Japanese Emperor. Congratulations, Senator!

Third, the year 1960 was the Year of Africa. Among the many African countries that gained independence that year, it was in Nigeria that Japan opened its Embassy first in the same year. So, Nigeria, you are the number one!

What's more, His Majesty the Emperor of Japan was born in February 1960. Therefore, both the Japanese Emperor and Nigeria will be 60 years old this year.

## 2. (Long-Term Relations)

Ever since the independence of Nigeria, Japan and Nigeria have enjoyed a friendly relationship in both bilateral and international fora. Japan has been a committed development partner for Nigeria. Japan has conducted numerous projects through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), International Organizations, and the embassy's Grass-Roots Grant Assistance Program.

## 3. (Recent positive trend)

In addition to long-term relations, we have witnessed more and more positive developments lately.

### (1) VIP visits

In terms of VIPs visits, 2019 was a great year. We had many top leaders visiting Japan including H.E. President Buhari and the Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, for the 7<sup>th</sup> Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD7), followed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Honorable Gbajabiamila; the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Mr. Mustapha, the Honorable Minister of Interior, Ogbeni Aregbesola, the Honorable Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Mohammed, many Governors and dignitaries.

### (2) Business

With regard to trade and investment, contrary to the general image, Nigeria has always had a trade surplus with Japan. Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) opened its Nigeria Office in 1955, even before the independence of Nigeria. Japan was by far the biggest importer in the world of LNG from Nigeria in 2015. The number of Japanese companies in Nigeria has tripled in the last decade. Some of them are displaying their products at today's reception. Following the agreement at the Summit Meeting at TICAD7, Japan Nigeria Business Facilitation Council was established last November.

### (3) People-to-People

Concerning people-to-people exchanges, Japan has extended scholarships, training programs, invitation schemes and many others. One of the latest invitees to Japan is Ms. Rachel Bakam, Nigerian CEO and TV Presenter. Let me read out the comment she posted on social media, "in all I would say that Japan is a beautiful country with some ancient traditions side by side the newest technology. So it's a blend of the old and the new. Great lovely people, wonderful food, fantastic weather, beautiful places to visit. You should visit Japan."

### (4) Culture

On cultural exchange, we attended the Annual Conference on Japanese Studies in Africa hosted by the African Association for Japanese Studies chaired by Dr. Doyin Aguru, University of Ibadan, and screened Japanese movies at events such as the African International Film Festival in Lagos (AFRIFF), organized by Ms. Chioma Ude. It was heartwarming to see the Nigerian audience enjoy Japanese movies.

## 4.(Future)

Further, we look forward to upcoming big events.

### (1) This Year

As you know, Japan will be hosting the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games this summer. When IOC president Thomas Bach visited Nigeria to commission the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa last November, he said that Nigeria is the Olympic headquarters of Africa and that Abuja is the capital of sports in Africa. Japan and Nigeria share the spirit of the Olympic Movement, and I would like to welcome to Tokyo as many Nigerian athletes and players as possible.

## (2) Beyond

It is still about 5 years away but we are also going to host Osaka Expo 2025. Osaka is one of the biggest merchant cities of Japan. Participation in the Osaka EXPO should be a very good opportunity for Nigeria to demonstrate and promote its economy.

## 5.(Conclusion)

To conclude, if I may borrow the words from President Buhari's New Year message, I have a high expectation that the newly started decade will be a time of hope, optimism and fresh possibilities for our two countries.

Lastly, my sincere appreciation goes to my colleagues at the Embassy for their hard work towards realizing this reception. I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to our diplomatic colleagues and representatives of international communities who are supporting our daily activities, and of course to our Nigerian friends who are contributing to the promotion of Japan-Nigeria relations. Once again, thank you all for coming and please enjoy the rest of the evening. Thank you.