

Press Release

Embassy of Japan

Press Release

1 December 2020

Foreign Minister's Commendations for FY 2020

Professor James Chukwuma Ogbonna

Professor Mohammed Dauda

The first Nigerians for the Commendations

On December 1st, 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan announced the recipients of the Foreign Minister's Commendations for FY 2020. Professor James C. Ogbonna and Professor Mohammed Dauda are among this year's recipients. This is the first time that Nigerians receive this Commendation.

The Foreign Minister's Commendations are awarded to individuals and groups with outstanding achievements in international fields, in order to acknowledge their contributions to the promotion of friendship between Japan and other countries and areas. The Commendations also aim to promote the understanding and support of the Japanese public for the activities of the recipients.

SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Professor James Chukwuma Ogbonna

(1) SERVICE: Promotion of mutual understanding between Japan and Nigeria

(2) MAJOR TITLE: Former Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), University of Nigeria, Nsukka

(3) Professor Ogbonna has played an important role for many years in improving the Japan-Nigeria relationship. He obtained a Master's Degree and a Doctor of Philosophy in Japan as a scholarship recipient of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports Science and Technology of Japan (MEXT). After coming back to Nigeria, in his role as Professor at The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, he contributed to conclude inter-university exchange agreements with Hokkaido University, University of Tsukuba and so on. His contributions also extended to promote Japan as Friends of Japan Association (Nippon Tomodachi Kyokai) has been formed in University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with their staff who studied in Japan, and Japanese language course started in 2018 during his tenure as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at the University. He promotes not only academic exchanges, but also Japanese culture and mutual understanding between Nigeria and Japan.

2. Professor Mohammed Dauda

(1) SERVICE: Promotion of mutual understanding between Japan and Nigeria

(2) MAJOR TITLE: President, Nigeria-Japan Alumni Association (NAIJAA)

(3) Professor Dauda has played an important role for many years in improving the Japan-Nigeria relationship. He established the Nigeria-Japan Alumni Association (NAIJAA) in 2016, and in his role as President of the Association, supports a screening of scholarship recipients by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports Science and Technology of Japan (MEXT). Using his experience as recipient of MEXT Scholarship, where he obtained a Doctorate degree of Engineering, he contributes to promote understanding of Japan telling his story in Japan and Japanese culture to Nigerian students. Japanese culture club is also established at the University of Abuja and Baze University, Abuja, through his support. His role contributes to expand Japanese culture in Nigeria.



Prof James Chukwuma Ogbonna

It is heartening that my little efforts are being recognized in this special way. I believe that establishing and maintaining good relationship between Nigeria and Japan at the three cadres – government, business and individual levels is very important, not just for the two countries but for the entire world. For this to happen, those of us who have had the privilege of living in the two countries should take up the challenge of correcting some misinformation, passing on the correct information, and explaining each other's cultures and beliefs. Currently, we have thirty four (34) staff of University of Nigeria Nsukka that studied or had fellowships in Japan and we have formed Friends of Japan Association (Nippon Tomodachi Kyokai). Through this Association and the Japanese language programme, we will continue to promote Japanese language and culture. I am highly delighted that the current Japanese Ambassador to Nigeria, HE Ambassador Y. Kikuta has been making every effort to build on the good relationship that is existing between the two countries. He has achieved a lot within the short period he has stayed in Nigeria. Japanese assistance to Nigeria both in terms of her contribution to Nigerian Education and Health sectors, rural development as well as students, staff and cultural exchanges within this period is highly commendable.

This honour will definitely motivate me to make more efforts to improve on the relationship between the two countries. I want to sincerely thank HE Ambassador Y. Kikuta and the entire staff in the Japanese Embassy Abuja for their good work and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs for giving me this honour. Arigatougozaimasu. Gambarimashoo!



PROF. MOHAMMED DAUDA

I wish to express my profound gratitude to Almighty Allah for this blessing. I appreciate His Excellency, Ambassador Yutaka KIKUTA, for recommending me for the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation. Thank you very much for the award. I am truly honoured to receive it.

The Japanese people, under the auspices of the Japanese Government's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) granted me a scholarship in 1997 to undertake postgraduate studies in Mechanical Engineering, at the Tokyo Metropolitan University (TMU). The scholarship gave me the opportunity to undertake an intellectual adventure in a foreign country, creating an opportunity for an international adventure. It was not just a quest for me to acquire a higher degree; it was also a chance for me to learn about the culture and people of Japan.

Before I set out to go to Japan, I decided to set three objectives for myself, which to my mind were very critical to my personal development. The first objective was to deepen and broaden my knowledge in my subject area, mechanical engineering. The second objective was to learn the Japanese language and culture to ease my interaction with the Japanese people, and the third objective was to build a network of a life-long friendship with people across the world. I was also convinced that understanding the Japanese language and culture would help me to understand the Japanese people better. This, to my mind, would facilitate bringing back to Nigeria aspects of the Japanese spirit of hard work, quality, love for nature and humanity and to build a network of friends with the intention of promoting friendship and mutual understanding.

I was conscious of the fact that my going to Japan had to be goal-oriented. Thus, it was my understanding that I was studying for my personal and intellectual development, I was also studying for my family and friends and, in particular, for my country. I am glad to state that I got a supportive environment, through the generosity of the Japanese people, to achieve all these. I returned to Nigeria in 2002 after successful completion of my studies fond of Japan with good memories of its people and their generosity. When I returned to Nigeria, I had the singular thought of finding a way of actualizing ways of maintaining the relationship with Japan and my colleagues in TMU and around Japan. So I decided to get myself involved in various activities that encourage mutual

understanding and friendship between Japan and Nigeria. One of the activities that I undertook culminated into the establishment of the Nigeria-Japan Alumni Association (NAIJAA) in 2016, which I became its pioneer president, the position I am still occupying. The Nigeria-Japan Alumni Association (NAIJAA), in its short lifespan of four years, recorded some modest achievements singly or in collaboration with the Embassy of Japan and organizations sharing similar objectives. NAIJAA is efficiently and effectively achieving its goal that entails contributing to the strengthening and developing friendly ties and cooperation between Japan and Nigeria.

The membership and activities of the association continue to grow in the same way the knowledge about Japan continues to blossom in Nigeria. The upsurge is partly resulting from the improvement in the number of MEXT scholarship recipients and partly due to the aggressive advocacy/public enlightenment on Japan through both conventional and social media platforms adopted by the current Ambassador, H. E. Yutaka KIKUTA. His action-packed tenure is promoting Japan in Nigeria more than ever before.

Members of NAIJAA have through their modest effort become the unofficial ambassadors of the Japanese people as many find it interesting that we had the opportunity to live and study in Japan. This has continued to attract more interest on Japan, its people and culture, which we continue to gladly share our experiences, thus supporting the Ambassador towards enhancing the visibility of Japan and the culture of its people in Nigeria.

This is being consolidated by the increasing number of activities by the Embassy of Japan in Nigeria, Japanese companies and the alumni association. The establishment of Japanese culture clubs at the University of Abuja and Baze University, Abuja, showcasing Japan in form of lectures and conferences as well as mentoring offered by the alumni members on study in Japan, Japanese language and culture play tremendous roles in provoking and sustaining interest thereby promoting understanding and friendship between the two countries. This is evident and well-captured in one of my 2016 presentations in Tokyo, Japan titled *“Quietly Linking Loudly: A Story of 20 Years of Friendship, Academic and Cultural Linkage”*.

I must put on record that this award is certainly unique in my heart. As a matter of fact, I have received numerous awards in different endeavours, e.g., Teaching Innovation (Ford Foundation, USA), Research (Materials Research Society of Japan – MRS-J), Distinguished Service (Embassy of Japan in Nigeria), etc. However, I cherish this award as it is the first of its kind in my collection; an award with a “diplomatic touch”.

In conclusion, this award wouldn't have been possible without the support of the Embassy of Japan, NAIJAA members and the encouragement I received from the University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID) management and so many people including my family members, students, mentees, colleagues and the general public. It will certainly serve as a tonic in making me put in my best in promoting mutual understanding and friendship between Nigeria and Japan. Thus, I must surely do my best to merit this recognition. I sincerely thank you all.