

**Speech by Ambassador of Japan to Malawi, Mr. Yasushi Naito at the Inauguration
Ceremony for the Improvement of Lilongwe Bridge in Lilongwe on 12th February 2026**

- ❖ Honourable Jappie Mhango, M.P., Minister of Transport and Public Works
- ❖ Honourable Chimwemwe Chipungu M.P., Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development
- ❖ Mr. IMAFUKU Takao, Director-General, African Affairs Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
- ❖ Mr. Bright Kumwembe, Principal Secretary for Transport and Public Works
- ❖ Mr. Amiel Champiti, Chief Executive Officer, Roads Authority
- ❖ Your Worship, Councillor Alex Banda, Mayor of Lilongwe City
- ❖ Dr Macleod Kadam'manja, Chief Executive Officer, Lilongwe City Council
- ❖ Mr. Tanaka Yukinari, Chief Representative of JICA Malawi
- ❖ Representatives of Katahira & Engineers International and Dai Nippon
- ❖ All Government Officials present
- ❖ Members of the press
- ❖ Distinguished Guests,
- ❖ Ladies and gentlemen

Mwadzuka bwanji nonse – Good morning every one

Ndikuthokoza kwambiri chifukwa cha mwayi wolankhula nanu pa tsiku lofunika ngati ili.
(I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you in this important day.)

Good morning.

I am the new Ambassador of Japan to Malawi, having presented Letters of Credence to HE President Prof. Arthur Peter Mutharika on January 30. Since then, I have paid courtesy calls on many cabinet members, including Honourable Minister Mhango and exchanged views on the future of Japan–Malawi relations. It is therefore my great honour and privilege, to address this distinguished gathering on the occasion of the inauguration of the Project for the Improvement of Main Roads in the City of Lilongwe — an achievement of profound significance for the people of Malawi and for the wider region.

Two days ago, I joined a cleanup activity and worked with Hon Dr. Ben Phiri, the Minister of Local Government and His worship Mayor, Councillor Alex Banda to clean this bridge. I

thoroughly enjoyed cleaning like in Japan and I was encouraged to see members of the public prompted joining the activity. I commend JICA and City of Lilongwe for joining hands to lead such an initiative. They even composed an upbeat song dedicated for cleaning activity to make it more fun. Thank you Mayor and JICA for the wonderful initiative.

Today, we are honored to have Mr. Imafuku, Director-General for African Affairs, who has travelled all the way from Japan to attend the inauguration of this Friendship Bridge. He made his visit to Malawi out of 54 African countries. His presence here demonstrates the depth and strength of the bond our two nations continue to share. The decision of the highest official responsible for African policy in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be with us on this historic occasion speaks volumes. I believe this visit serves as a powerful impetus for the future relation between Japan and Malawi.

Honourable Ministers, the road popularly known as the M1 Road, forms a vital part of the Nacala Corridor and it is the principal north-south trunk road of this country. It serves as a critical route for the movement of people, goods, and services across Malawi and beyond its borders, linking communities, markets, and neighbouring countries. Within Lilongwe City, the section of this highway at the old Lilongwe Bridge had long presented many challenges. Persistent traffic congestion, caused by insufficient capacity, resulted in daily delays and traffic accidents. These conditions affected not only commuter convenience but also road safety and economic productivity.

The project was therefore conceived as one of the outcomes of the Urban Development Master Plan for Lilongwe City, developed by the Government of Malawi with the support from JICA way back in 2010. Later, a preliminary study aimed at solving traffic congestion in Lilongwe was conducted in 2011, followed by the preparatory survey which started in October 2017 and was completed in June 2019 with an outline design of the Project. By expanding the roadway and replacing the old bridge with a modern, high-capacity structure, the project addresses both current demands and the future needs of this rapidly growing Capital City. And we are pleased to have Mr. Imafuku with us today, he is one of those who started this project when he was director in charge in the International Cooperation Bureau.

Beyond the physical infrastructure, this project has delivered important human capital benefits, particularly through capacity building for Malawi's young people. During the planning and construction phases, young engineers, technicians, and skilled workers gained valuable hands-on experience, technical knowledge, and professional skills. This transfer of knowledge strengthens local capacity, supports employment, and empowers the next generation to contribute meaningfully to Malawi's infrastructure development and long-term growth.

Today's inauguration therefore marks an important milestone in Malawi's ongoing socio-economic development. Efficient and reliable transport infrastructure is a cornerstone of sustainable growth. By strengthening connectivity within Lilongwe and along the Nacala Corridor, this project supports trade, stimulates investment, and unlocks new economic opportunities for citizens and businesses. This highway is more than concrete and asphalt; it is

a pathway to prosperity and human development, an embodiment of people's aspiration and dreams, bridging goodwill and friendship.

As the Ambassador of Japan to Malawi, I wish to extend our sincere appreciation to all who contributed to the successful completion of this project. We commend the Government of Malawi for its leadership and vision; the Ministry of Transport, Roads Authority, Lilongwe City Council, Lilongwe Water Board, ESCOM, and not forgetting JICA, project consultant Katahira & Engineers International and the project contractor, Dai Nippon and its affiliates, for your professionalism and dedication.

In conclusion, we place this important infrastructure in the able hands of the people of Malawi. May we collectively commit to its effective use, care, and maintenance, ensuring that benefits serve generations to come.

Honourable Ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is with great joy that we celebrate this handover today, and we look forward to the enhanced mobility, improved safety, strengthened skills, and expanded economic opportunity it will bring. May this bridge be remembered as a symbol of the friendship between Japan and Malawi.

Thank you. Zikomo kwambiri.