

Speech by Mr NAITO Yasushi, Ambassador of Japan to Malawi at the Celebration of the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan on February 19, 2026

(Acknowledgements)

- Our Distinguished Guest of Honour, Honourable Roza Fatch Mbilizi, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development,
- Right Honourable Michael Bizwick Usi, Former Vice President of the Republic of Malawi,
- Hon Nancy Tembo, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperations
- Leaders and representatives of political parties present here,
- Dr Noel Kayla, Deputy Inspector General of the Malawi Police Service,
- Your Worship Councilor Peter Alex Banda, Mayor of Lilongwe City,
- Senior Government Officials present here,
- Your Excellency Dr. Nancy Saungweme, the Ambassador of the Republic of Zimbabwe and the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,
- Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International Organizations,
- Mr. TANAKA Yukinari, Chief Representative of JICA
- Fellow Japanese Citizens,
- Friends from the Private Sector,
- Friends from the Media,
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

(Celebrating the Emperor's Birthday)

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the national day reception of Japan, celebrating the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan who turns 66 years of age on 23rd February. I am NAITO Yasushi, the new Ambassador of Japan to Malawi. On 30th of January, I had the honour of presenting the Letters of Credence from His Majesty the Emperor to His Excellency the President, Prof Arthur Peter Mutharika and became the seventh resident Ambassador of Japan since the establishment of our resident Embassy in Lilongwe in 2008 in our 62 years of diplomatic relations.

Let me share with you that yesterday, the Second Administration led by Prime Minister Takaichi was formed after the ceremony in the presence of His Majesty the Emperor.

Honourable Minister, Distinguished Guests, His Majesty the Emperor is a

long-standing supporter of the activities of JICA Overseas Volunteers program and Malawi happens to be the world's largest recipient of JICA volunteers adding a special touch to the Japan-Malawi relations. His Majesty the Emperor in fact graced the 60th year celebration event of JOCV last year in Tokyo where former JICA volunteers to Malawi were core presenters at the event. We treasure the JOCV for being our grassroots Ambassadors who transfer professional knowledge and skills in diverse fields to communities in Malawi and they too learn and gain rich inspiration from the people of Malawi with deep appreciation. Today, I am glad that some of the JOCV members are here with us singing national anthems. I hope you will have a chance to talk to them.

(Bond of friendship)

During our 62 years of diplomatic relations, Japan and Malawi have built a friendship based on mutual trust and cooperation. The bonds of friendship have been further consolidated through people to people exchange including the 1,965 JOCV volunteers that have been dispatched to Malawi and also the awardees of various training programs in Japan such as over 130 Japanese Government MEXT scholarship scholars; some 200 trainees of various mining related programs under the Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security (JOGMEC); and the more than 3000 JICA trainees. The passion and positive power of both the Malawians and Japanese who bridge our nations have been driving force of the bilateral relations between Japan and Malawi.

It is encouraging to see the human-to-human interactions broadening to universities, municipalities, and the fields of sports and music. The Embassy wishes to continue providing its support to such undertakings. In this connection, today, representatives of a Japanese non-profit organization, AIMEC or Association of International Music Exchange for Children are here with us, who will be donating musical instruments to the Malawi Police Band tomorrow. We thank you and welcome your initiative.

(A new Landmark of friendship, Lilongwe Bridge)

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Through our friendship, Japan has cooperated with Malawi by providing Official Development Assistance for construction and rehabilitation of Kamuzu International Airport, power stations and sub-stations, irrigation systems, teachers training colleges and also for initiatives such as the One Village One Product; rice production; the Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion (SHEP) scheme, which promotes market-oriented farming; as well as the promotion of Kaizen among others.

Last week, we were pleased to hand over the Lilongwe Bridge on the M1 road to the Government of Malawi through Hon. Jappie Mhango, Minister of Transport and Public Works. We are happy to see the bridge already making a difference in alleviating congestion, preventing accidents, showing resilience against heavy rain and improving the lives of people. The bridge is part of the Nakala Corridor development and is expected to contribute to industrial development and cross border trade to enhance the regional supply chain. This project has also facilitated the transfer of knowledge to strengthen local capacity and also provided employment. This highway is more than concrete and asphalt; it is a pathway to prosperity and people's aspiration. I joined the cleaning campaign of the bridge with Hon. Dr Ben Phiri, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development and the Mayor of Lilongwe City. I was encouraged to see members of the public spontaneously joining in the cleaning. I am convinced that the Bridge is now in good hands and will be cared for, for many years to come. We hope Lilongwe Bridge will be remembered as a symbol of the friendship that bridges Japan and Malawi.

(Review of 2025)

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to also share some highlights of 2025, which was yet another remarkable year in our friendship with various significant events.

One such event was the World Expo in Osaka from April to October 2025, whose theme was "Designing the Future Society of our Lives." The Expo gave the a platform to showcase their treasures and innovations in view of promoting global synergy, which extends to concerted efforts in addressing global issues including accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals. Malawi sent a full delegation to Osaka, which presented Malawi's appeal and opportunities to Japan and to the world. Many people told me that the Malawi Pavilion was especially reputable on developmental aspects, agriculture, as well as the tourism potential of Lake Malawi.

Another highlight of 2025 was the Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD9), which took place in August and was also attended by a Ministerial delegation from Malawi headed by Honourable Nancy Tembo, then Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. TICAD9 was held under the theme "Co-create innovative solutions with Africa," and focused on innovative solutions for resilience and growth. TICAD9 culminated into numerous action plans and more than 320 MOUs between Japanese companies and entities in Africa including Malawi. Meanwhile, Japanese Government presented its development agenda of the Nacala Corridor through various infrastructure

related projects in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia in a bid to strengthen the global supply chain.

Another significant event of 2025 was the successful conduct of peaceful elections in Malawi followed by a peaceful transition of power, which reinforced our shared value and principle of peace, democracy, rule of law, respect to dignity and human security. The Embassy undertook an electoral observer role and appreciated the peaceful conduct of stakeholders. This clearly demonstrated the maturity of Malawi's democracy as well as the peace-loving nature of Malawians.

In the past year, the Embassy also actively promoted both cultural and people to people exchange. We hosted Japan Day in August, which showcased aspects of Japanese culture including food, music, art and Kimono experience. The Embassy also bestowed the Japanese Ambassador's certificate of commendation to the Karate Association of Malawi in recognition of its efforts in promoting it that led to the growing popularity of Karate in Malawi. The Embassy also hosted a Japan alumni networking reception that brought together alumni, government officials and private industry players who have special visit experience in Japan, believing these human-to-human bonds are the most important asset of our two countries.

(Looking ahead in 2026)

Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The successes of 2025 have given us impetus 2026. We already started with the inauguration of Lilongwe Bridge as well as hosting a business promotion event with participation of 17 Japanese companies.

Looking ahead, we will continue to actively cooperate with Malawi. Some of the areas of focus this year include infrastructure development, particularly the development of the Nacala Corridor initiative, irrigation systems, the preparatory survey on M1 extension and food security among others. With trade and investment being an essential backbone of economic growth that leads to mutual benefit, the Embassy wishes to collaborate with the Government of Malawi to enhance efforts to share business opportunities in Malawi to potential Japanese investors. As the Green Expo in 2027 in Yokohama is another great opportunity that Malawi has affirmed participation, we will embark on preparations with stakeholders. In this connection, please stop by the booths of some of the Japanese companies and organizations that are exhibiting their goods and services tonight to appreciate their endeavors.

Following the successful visit of Mr. IMAFUKU Takao our then Director General of African Affairs of MOFA, we are expecting more visitors and missions from Japan that could uplift bilateral relations and investment. Coincidentally, Mr. IMAFUKU, was on Tuesday appointed as Director General of International Cooperation Bureau, a top official of Official Development Assistance globally and he will continue to support the Japan-Malawi relations in his powerful new roll. I can confidently tell you that he became an avid supporter of Malawi following his visit last week.

We also look forward to continuing promoting skills and knowledge transfer through the JOCV volunteer program, technical cooperation, and our various scholarships, all of which address the various sectoral development needs in Malawi including health, education, mining, energy, ICT, agriculture and industrialization, aligning the emphasis of State of Nation Address by His Excellency the President presented last week. This year marks 55th year since Japan dispatched first JOCV volunteers to Malawi in 1971 and we hope to have a special celebration when the number of volunteers to Malawi reaches to 2000, which no other countries has ever achieved.

(Conclusion)

Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen

In concluding my remarks, I wish to once again thank you for your kind presence. I look forward to interacting with you further this evening and hope you will have a pleasant evening sampling the delicious Japanese cuisine and selected Sake as you network. Enjoy a special moment tasting freshly fried Tempura and Seared Salmon & Tuna Nigiri Sushi, prepared by our culinary diplomat, Chef Ofuji.

Thank you for your attention and enjoy your evening.

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