

**Remarks by NAITO Yasushi, Ambassador of Japan to Malawi at the
National ICT Innovation Awards (on 21st April)**

- Honourable Dr. Shadric Namalomba, Minister of Information and Communication Technology,
- Honourable Alfred Gangata, Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture,
- Honourable Joel Chigona, Minister of Labour, Skills and Innovation,
- Honourable Mary Navicha, Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare,
- His Worship the Mayor of Lilongwe City, Councillor Alex Peter Banda,
- Mr. Harold Msusa, Principal Secretary of Information and Communication Technology, and all the Principal Secretaries present,
- Counsel Chancy Gondwe, Board Chairperson of MACRA,
- Mr. Mayamiko Nkoloma, Director General of MACRA,
- Government officials and captains of industries present,
- Members of the Press,
- Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Muadzuka Bwanji Nonse.

It is with distinct honour and I feel humbled to be invited to this important occasion and have an opportunity to stand before you to present some remarks. Malawi stands at a defining moment in its digital transformation. As the global economy advances to another level with rapid application of artificial intelligence, it is evident that successful transformation requires deliberate and coordinated efforts by governments, regulators, industry players, and development partners.

In this regard, I wish to congratulate the Government of Malawi, particularly the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA), for this timely initiative that celebrates homegrown digital innovation. By providing this platform, MACRA is fostering ICT-driven thinking and solutions among young generation that directly respond to Malawi's development needs.

MACRA's efforts are well aligned with Malawi 2063, where ICT is recognized as a key enabler in building an inclusive and self-reliant nation. In this context,

Japan continues to support promoting ICT and digitization in Malawi, including through initiatives such as the Social Innovators Forum Africa (SIFA). In January this year, the Embassy witnessed the successful culmination of SIFA Malawi, a platform that empowered young innovators to develop practical solutions to social challenges.

This initiative aligns closely with Japan's broader engagement with Africa under the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) framework. At TICAD 9, held in Yokohama in August last year under the theme "*Co-creating Innovative Solutions with Africa*," Japan reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening public-private partnerships, leveraging Africa's youth population, and advancing innovation through technology. The Yokohama Declaration further underscored the importance of accelerating collaborative efforts to address global challenges.

Japan invites young leaders under African Business Education Initiative to Japan for master's program and internship in Japanese companies. JICA has hosted a total of 34 students from Malawi to Japan. This includes the Principal Secretary of Information who visited Japan under this program in 2006 and who surprised me this morning by greeting me in Japanese in perfect pronunciation.

Japan also dispatched 4 students to master's program under MEXT scholarship program this year. They are expected to acquire advanced knowledge and skills needed in Malawi in their respective professional fields, come back in two years and contribute to the development of Malawi.

One lady participant from South Africa, Ms Pelonomi Moiloa has invented a Artificial Intelligence program that interpret different verbal African languages seamlessly and she was chosen as one of "100 most influential AI leaders" in the world by TIME magazine. This is one success story of Africa.

But I was very much impressed to see exhibition booths and presentations by 20 innovators this morning with ministers. Your innovative solutions are high standard, and all made in Malawi!

Here in Malawi, you have wonderful story of the inventor William Kamkwamba. The story of 14-year boy inventing windmill to power device, "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" has inspired so many people in the world.

Successful startups in Malawi are rapidly emerging, particularly in fintech, renewable energy, and aggrotech. Japanese startups are also working in Malawi. “Sora” meaning sky in Japanese, for instance, is using drone to identify mosquito prone ponds to tackle Malaria and has recently procured 2.5 million dollars from impact fund investors.

One of program Japan is involved this year is open innovation challenge among technical colleges of Japan. “Kosen” is 5 year system of education that start 15 years of age specialized in engineering, offering alternative path to traditional university path. Kosen is one element that made possible Japan’s remarkable economic advancement, namely doubling of income in 10 years in 1970’s.

Kosen is now playing an important role in Japan’s startup and innovation ecosystem. They are visiting in September to seek to find solutions to social challenges of Malawi using innovations in collaboration with African partners. I thus wish to respectfully invite some of the top winners of the National ICT Innovation Awards to interact with Japanese innovators. This is precisely in line with the theme of TICAD, “*Co-creating Innovative Solutions with Africa*”.

In conclusion, I wish all the best to participants for the competition and mutual learning that leads to meaningful partnership. Such partnerships are essential in building inclusive, resilient, and future-ready digital economies so that Malawi will “harness the wind” to fly high. Japan remains committed to working together to support Malawi’s innovation ecosystem.

Zikomo Kwambiri.

Thank you for your attention.

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