

My name is Jacob Nankhonya, a journalist with Nation Publications Ltd, I would like to do an article that will appear in one of NPL's publications therefore I would like to solicit some responses to the questions below from Ambassador NAITO Yasushi, the current Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Republic of Malawi.

1. I understand that Foreign Minister of Japan has visited Africa recently. What is its implication to Malawi?

From April 26 to May 6, Mr Toshimitsu Motegi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan visited Eastern and Southern Africa, including Zambia, Angola, Kenya and South Africa, and had audiences with Presidents in addition to bilateral meetings with his counterparts. In Zambia, Minister visited Hitachi Construction Machinery plant which is providing mining machinery to Malawi. In Kenya, Minister Motegi delivered a policy speech on Africa, which attracted 570 people interested in Japan-Africa relations. The speech has significant relevance to the Japan-Malawi relations as all the priority pillars apply to Malawi. I am therefore anticipating high level missions from Japan like that of Minister Motegi to visit Malawi soon. Let me take this opportunity to share the elements.

As Minister Motegi highlighted in his speech, “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” is the fundamental diplomatic policy of Japan. Indo-Pacific connects the continents of Africa and Asia as a single, integrated space. Anchored in the core principles of freedom, openness, diversity, inclusiveness, and the rule of law, this vast region, which is home to over half of the world’s population and accounts for nearly 60 percent of global GDP, is envisioned as a place where people would meet, cooperate, and together build peace and prosperity for the future international community. This vision was first shared by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 6) held ten years ago on the African soil, in Kenya. This certainly applies to Malawi, which is a landlocked country whose trade is carried out through lifeline corridors to the Indian Ocean.

Since the introduction of the FOIP vision, The United States and many other countries, as well as regions such as European Union and ASEAN, have also announced their own initiatives related to the Indo Pacific. Today, it has become a widely shared understanding within the international community that maintaining and expanding a free and open international order across this region is a necessity. In the face of various economic and social challenges and increasingly difficult international situations, and to meet challenges of the times, it is important for the people in the region to enhance their resilience. Japan continues to promote the FOIP and is providing support to enhancing the resilience of the people, as was announced by Prime Minister Takaichi on the 2nd of May 2026 during her visit to Vietnam.

2. What will be the priority areas in Malawi during your term of office?

In line with the vision, Minister Motegi announced three pillars of Japan’s policy on Africa, namely; “Realizing a Continent of Peace in Africa”; second, “Creating a Virtuous Cycle of

Growth between Africa and Japan”; and third, “Realizing a Society where Everyone Can Genuinely Feel Prosperity, through Empowering Young-Generation Co-Creation.”

Firstly, Malawi being a peaceful country has actively contributed to creating peace in Africa and rightfully shares this vision. Malawi also shares the values of democracy, human rights, rule of law and inclusive development and has successfully overcome challenging moments to avoid conflicts and turmoil through its wisdom and discipline. I look forward to continuing working together with Malawi to uphold peace in the region and the continent.

Secondly, as for “Virtuous Cycle of Growth between Africa and Japan,” Minister Motegi mentioned Japan’s partnership on critical minerals supply chains that bring investment and contribute to Africa’s sustainable growth. In Malawi, mining is the game changer for its economic turnaround such that the Malawi Government places high priority on the sector whilst the Japanese private sector is a key stakeholder for this industry. Therefore, as I pledged to His Excellency the President, Prof Arthur Peter Mutharika, I wish to work to the best of my ability to advance business relations including exportation of Malawi’s tobacco, tea and sesame to Japan and exportation of Japanese vehicles and machinery needed for Malawi’s economy including the mining sector for our mutual benefit during my term of office. This is on top of advancing development cooperation that Japan has been engaging in during our 62 years of diplomatic relations.

Thirdly, “Realizing a Society where Everyone Can Genuinely Feel Prosperity, through Empowering Young-Generation Co-Creation” is precisely an important pillar for Malawi. Japan has dispatched more than 4,700 experts and volunteers to Malawi. As for volunteers, Malawi is so far, the recipient of the highest number of JICA volunteers in the world. Human resource development is the core of Japan’s development cooperation with Malawi, covering all the sectors including, education, agriculture, infrastructure, health, industries as well as science, including rapidly expanding innovators. Based on Japan’s own experience of economic development, we believe skilled human resource along with strong ownership is the most important element for sustainable economic growth.

3. In the area of transport and infrastructure, are there any projects apart from the Lilongwe Bridge which opened recently?

In addition to constructing the Kamuzu International Airport in 1988, and Lilongwe Bridge this year, the Government of Japan has undertaken a wide range of infrastructure development projects in Malawi. These include the replacement of the South Rukuru Bridge, the reconstruction of bridges along National Route 5 between Balaka and Salima, the replacement of Mangochi Bridge, main roads improvement works in Blantyre, and the expansion of the Tedzani II Hydropower Plant, contributing to the country's overall economic growth and connectivity. Re-vitalization of development of Nacala Corridor is Japan’s focus as announced at TICAD 9 in Japan last year. Minister Motegi affirmed this in his policy speech in Kenya that the Nacala Corridor is an important initiative to promote industrialization, regional trade as well as promoting private sector investment including mineral resources industry.

4. Japan believes in human resource development, what is it doing to avail education opportunities to Malawians? (ie provision of scholarships).

The Embassy of Japan in Malawi offers the Japanese Government (MEXT) Scholarship for research students and secondary school teachers. To date, the Embassy has achieved sending approximately 140 young Malawians to Japan, many of whom have returned with invaluable skills and knowledge and are now forefront in their respective fields.

In addition, through the African Business Education (ABE) Initiative, participants pursue a master's degree at leading Japanese universities, while also benefiting from internship placements with Japanese companies. Furthermore, JICA implements a variety of training programs in Japan, with a significant number of Malawian professionals participating each year. The number of Malawians accepted for JICA training has exceeded 3,000. The Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security (JOGMEC) has trained 200 Malawians in the mining field with 11 more through JICA's Kizuna program. Thus, I feel we are fortunate to have big alumni both Malawians and Japanese, who are willing to bridge Japan and Malawi for our effort to advance Malawi's growth as well as to enhance virtuous cycle of mutual growth.

5. Is there anything being done to promote standards of teachers the country produces?

Through the construction of Domasi College and Nalikule Teacher Training College, Japan has provided substantial support to promote the training and supply of high-quality teachers. Furthermore, technical cooperation for secondary education has been implemented through the Strengthening of Mathematics and Science Education (SMASSE) program, which has significantly strengthened students' competencies in mathematics and science, while helping to lay the foundation for the development of skilled human resources to advanced industries.

In addition, the JICA Volunteers Program has been dispatching volunteers to Malawi since 1971, many of whom are experienced schoolteachers. These dedicated volunteers teach directly in local schools, delivering high-quality education to children at the grassroots level, and making a lasting impact on the lives of the communities they serve. I was humbled when I was told by some of the cabinet ministers that they have been taught by JICA volunteers in their school days, which is a proud achievement of our cooperation.

6. Still on education, what is Japan doing in the country to help improve education infrastructure?

In addition to the construction of Domasi College and Nalikule Teacher Training College, the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects scheme has been instrumental in expanding classroom capacity in schools across the country. To date, more than 40 schools have benefited from the construction of additional classrooms and improved sanitation facilities. Moreover,

considerable efforts have been made to support the construction of libraries and science laboratories, further enhancing the overall learning environment for students nationwide.

7. Share with me what is being done to promote market-oriented farming?

The Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion (SHEP) Approach is designed to encourage vegetable and fruit farmers to shift their mindset from 'producing first and then searching for buyers' to 'producing what sells.' This market-oriented approach aims to improve farmers' farm management and cultivation skills, ultimately increasing their horticultural income and enhancing their livelihoods.

The SHEP Approach has been successfully implemented in Malawi and has since been institutionalized as a key component of the national agricultural policy under the Ministry of Agriculture, reflecting the Government's commitment to sustainable and market-driven agricultural development.

8. What, do you think needs to be done for Malawi to get out of its perpetual challenges in areas of hunger, disaster related problems year in, year out?

The challenges facing Malawi are multifaceted and must be addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner. At the heart of all these efforts are people — human resources. Again, highly skilled individuals, as well as grassroots innovators who work tirelessly to solve challenges within their local communities, play a critical and indispensable role in driving sustainable development. In this context, Japan remains committed not only to the development of infrastructure, but also to strengthening industrial human resource development and enhancing essential social services to build a more prosperous and resilient Malawi.

As regards structural reform and fiscal consolidation led by the Ministry of Finance, Japan supports these efforts by the Government of Malawi and is closely collaborating through support by the World Bank and IMF together with UN agencies and other development partners.

9. Please do share your last word.

Although I have worked across Africa for more than three decades, this is my first time in Malawi. In the four months since my arrival, I have been impressed by the warmth and kindness of the Malawian people. Malawi truly lives up to its reputation as the 'Warm Heart of Africa.' The Philosophy of Umuntu "I am because we are" is deeply rooted and can be seen everywhere in Malawi including remote villages whereby caring for others, even strangers is a norm.

Since taking up my post as Ambassador, I have had the privilege of attending a number of events, with one memorable interaction being a community cleaning campaign in Lilongwe City. It was truly great to witness residents and vendors spontaneously joining the campaign and sharing in the joy of the moment together. I look forward to deepening my interaction with

people in Malawi and working together toward the sustainable development of their country and consequently improving their lives and well-being.

As I said, Malawi receives the world's highest number of JICA volunteers. They have been sincere grassroots ambassadors who stay with communities for 2 years and forge bonds of friendship throughout Malawi. We will celebrate 55th years of JICA volunteers to Malawi in November in thanking the people and Government of Malawi for their warm receptiveness and celebrate together our sustained passion for partnership over the years and for the future.

End