

## Remarks by Mr. Naito Yasushi, Ambassador of Japan to Malawi at the Footballs Handover Ceremony (5<sup>th</sup> June)

- ❖ Mr. Fleetwood Haiya, President of the Football Association of Malawi (FAM);
- ❖ Mr. Abdulraham Chiwalo, The General Secretary of the Football Association of Malawi,
- ❖ All members of the Football Association of Malawi;
- ❖ Colleges from the Media,
- ❖ Ladies and Gentlemen,

### **Mwaswela bwanji? – Good afternoon, everyone.**

I am honoured to stand before you today on behalf of the Project for Sports Diplomacy Enhancement under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, in collaboration with the Japan Football Association, as we hand over these footballs to the Football Association of Malawi (FAM) for the benefit of the people of Malawi.

This gesture serves not only to support football development in Malawi, but also as a symbol of friendship between peoples of Japan and Malawi.

From 2023 to 2025, a Japanese coach, Mr. Kosuke Shimabukuro, was dispatched as a JICA volunteer to FAM, particularly in providing guidance and support to the elite women football players. As you may be aware, Malawi is the largest recipient of JICA volunteers in the world, and I am pleased to share that this year marks 55 years since JICA commenced the dispatch of volunteers to Malawi.

On a similar note, there have been remarkable exchanges between Japan and Malawi through football.

Ten (10) years ago, a Japanese J-League player, Mr. Genki NAKAMURA, played in the Malawi Premier Division for the then BE FORWARD Wanderers (now known as Mighty Wanderers), while eight (8) years ago, former Mighty Wanderers and Flames player, Mr. Jabulani Linje, played in the J-League, the professional football league in Japan.

Although Malawi and Japan are geographically distant, our common passion for football is shared through human bonds through these football exchanges.

The Japan Football Association is grateful for the past collaboration with FAM and remains committed to strengthening this partnership. We hope donated footballs will be utilized for of young players at schools under FAM's guidance. This donation today also symbolizes the Japan Football Association's willingness to further deepening the friendship between our two nations through footballs.

As we are all aware, the much-anticipated FIFA World Cup 2026 kicks off in six (6) days, and I am sure we are all excited to witness the 104 matches that will once again bring the world together through football.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Government of Malawi, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation's, Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, and all other relevant personnel whose efforts have made this occasion possible.

May the friendship between our two nations continue to flourish.

I wish the people of Malawi, particularly the sports fraternity, continued success and growth.

Thank you very much.

**Zikomo Kwambiri**