Opening remarks by NAITO Yasushi, Ambassador of Japan to Malawi at the opening of the Japan Film Festival 2026 at Pabwalo Multipurpose Room, National Library Service, Lilongwe (30 October)

- Mr. Kapasule, National Librarian, National Library Service,
- Students and representatives of educational institutions,
- Fellow Japanese citizens in Malawi and JICA Overseas Volunteers,
- Friends from the private sector,
- Friends from the media,
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Muli bwanji nonse?

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 2026 Japan Film Festival, one of the Embassy of Japan's cultural events. I am Naito Yasushi, Ambassador of Japan to Malawi.

Following the successful Japan Day 2026 at Woodlands Farmers Market in September, we are delighted to bring to you another opportunity to experience Japanese culture, this time through film. This is the fourth time we are holding a Japan Film Festival in Malawi, and this year's festival is our biggest one. We are very happy to see this event growing, and I hope you will enjoy what we have prepared for you.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Films are an effective medium for deepening our understanding of people's lives, cultures, and trends evolving over time. They allow us to see how people live and what matters to them. They can also remind us of values that remain important across generations.

As you watch the films, you may notice some familiar things that connect Japan and Malawi. These might include respect for one another, the strong bonds within our communities, our sense of identity, and the stories we pass down from one generation to the next. In particular, the role of folklore in Japanese films may remind you of Malawi's own rich tradition of storytelling, that is popular among children every Saturday morning here in Pabwalo.

Japanese cinema is well known around the world for its distinctive style and thoughtful portrayal of human nature. Directors such as Akira Kurosawa, Yasujirō Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi have influenced filmmakers around the world. Meanwhile, animation filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki, co-founder of Studio Ghibli, has introduced audiences across generations to the imagination and storytelling of Japanese animation. Japanese films have also received international recognition, winning prestigious awards.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

We have selected four films for this festival, each offering something different. The lineup includes a drama on Japanese art of "Sumie" painting, an award-winning modern love comedy, we are screening today. Tomorrow we show an animation on "Kappa", folklore monsters believed to be inhibiting in the rivers, and another film of high school girls' coming of age stories on Kendo, Japanese martial art of swordsmanship that was demonstrated at Japan Day.

Whether you are interested in art, comedy, animation or sport, I hope there will be something here for everyone. And even if you are not familiar with Japanese films, I encourage you to sit back, enjoy the stories, and perhaps discover something new about Japan along the way.

Finally, I would like to thank the National Library Service for making Pabwalo available to us. Pabwalo, which opened earlier this year with the assistance of the Rei Foundation, founded by Reiko Fukutake, is a special gathering space for us.

I also thank everyone who has worked hard to organise this festival, as well as all of you for joining us.

Please enjoy the films, and I hope you have a wonderful time at the Japan Film Festival.

Thank you very much and let us enjoy films from Japan.

End