Speech by NAITO Yasushi, Ambassador of Japan in Malawi at the 55th Anniversary celebrations of JICA Overseas Cooperation Volunteers to Malawi (11th November)

●Our Guest of Honour, Honourable Dr George Thapatula Chaponda, MP, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation,
●Mr. Hilary Chimota, Principal Secretary for Human Resources and Development, Office of the President and Cabinet,
●Mr. Takuya OTSUKA, Director-General of the Secretariat of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer, traveled all the way from Tokyo
●Mr. Yukinari TANAKA, Chief Representative, JICA Malawi,
●All the officials of the Government of Malawi present,
●JICA volunteers and former volunteers to Malawi,
●Counterparts of JICA volunteers from all around Malawi,
●Members of Media,
●Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mwadzuka bwanji nonse?

Today, we celebrate another milestone of the Japan-Malawi relations. In 1971, five years after the independence and establishment of bilateral relations with Malawi, Japan dispatched first 7 JOCV volunteers to Malawi and since then begun the Japan Overseas Volunteer Program to Malawi, which has continuously grown for the past 55 years. To date, Malawi has received the highest number of JICA volunteers in the world, more than any other countries. The current accumulative number is 1983 volunteers in a total and it will soon reach 2000 perhaps in February next year.

It is an absolute joy for me as the Ambassador of Japan to Malawi to join you today in celebrating the 55th anniversary of the JICA Volunteer program to Malawi. For the past 10 months since my arrival in Malawi, through a number of occasions, I have been impressed with the volunteers for their incredible passion and positive power to work with their Malawian counterparts to find solutions to social challenges.

Honourble Minister,

In my courtesy calls on Cabinet Ministers and high-ranking officials, I was humbled to realize that I do not remember a single meeting where the contribution of JICA

volunteers was not mentioned. And even in the most remote village, villagers remember names of Japanese volunteers who assisted them years ago.

Upon completion of their assignment, I listen to each and every member of returning volunteers before their departure to Japan, and many shed tears sharing their experience. Their assignment is not without difficulties and inner conflicts. In fact, it is full of trial and errors.

They are overwhelmed at the end of assignment with their experience, firstly not knowing if their effort is bearing fruit; filled with anxiety, whether they are at all useful to the community. But through their trials and errors, they attain a sense achievement by overcoming the challenges in collaboration with their Malawian partners, thereby forging true trust and confidence as partners.

Although the volunteers are dispatched to share their professional knowledge and skills in their respective fields, Japanese volunteers are the ones who express deep appreciation to Malawi for offering them life changing insights that can guide them for the rest of their lives.

And even after their return to Japan, many continue to engage with Malawi through various development initiatives through activities of NGOs, municipalities, private companies, academic institutions, or even JICA Malawi and the Embassy of Japan.

Their dedication and strength of their affinity to Malawi is remarkable. A testament of this, is the Malawi Society of Japan which was established in Japan as early as 1983 by former JICA volunteers to Malawi and has been promoting friendly relations between the two countries with the catch phrase “Malawi, Japan’s closest Africa”.

Hence, JICA Overseas Volunteers have been at the center of forging human to human bonds between our two nations and even served as a driving force to bilateral relations between Japan and Malawi.

Here, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Honourable Chaponda, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, for issuing certificate of appreciation co-siged by Minister and myself to every returning volunteers. Certificates make volunteers proud for serving Malawi.

The JOCV program has therefore become the heart of the Japan-Malawi friendship and life-long lessons and experiences have culminated out of the formidable bonds that have been nurtured through the program. JOCV ndi moto kuti buuu [JOCV is fire]. Ndi engine ya ubale wathu. [it is the anchor of our relationship].

I am most pleased to share this episode with you. Honourable Roza Fatch Mbilizi, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development and also Honourable Dr. Jean Mathanga, Minister of Energy were both taught by a JOCV math teacher Mr. Osamu Takahashi in Stella Malis secondary school in Blantyre.

Honourable Mbilizi was also taught, alongside her school mates, a popular and sentimental Japanese song, "Kyo no Hi wa Sayonara," by the Takahasi sensei with his guitar, which goes 'Let us be friends always and forever". We were so surprised when Minister Mbilizi kindly sang it for us at one function wholeheartedly with incredible perfection. We were so moved that all the visiting businessmen from Japan find themselves singing together in a choir. It was the most inspirational moment I experienced in Malawi. The episode also tells to volunteers that children you teach today can be Ministers of tomorrow and change lives of so many people in Malawi.

Honourable Ministers, the human bond is further consolidated through the some 4000 Malawians who have studied in Japan either through JICA training or MEXT scholarship. The Japan-Malawi relations are truly blessed with thousands of motivated Malawians and Japanese who are eager to bridge the two countries. Human bonds are indeed the most important asset between our two countries.

As we commemorate the anniversary, I wish to join Mr. Tanaka of JICA Malawi, and respectfully remember and honour our 12 JOCV volunteers who sadly lost their lives during their dispatchment. Their dedication and love for Malawi will never be forgotten. We renew our commitment to enhance our efforts as well as to deliver JOCV's noble mission with utmost care and measures to protect safety and health of volunteers.

To conclude, I wish to once again congratulate all the JICA volunteers, JOCV secretariat and JICA Malawi as well as Malawian counterparts for the achievements of the 55 years of the JICA Volunteer Program in Malawi. I also wish to express our

deep appreciation to the Government of Malawi for the excellent cooperation in our enduring partnership. We thank people of Malawi for your warm heart, remarkable receptiveness and your love for Japanese volunteers.

Zikomo Kwanbiri,
Thank you for your attention.

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