

Message from the Ambassador of Japan to the Kingdom of Eswatini on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Eswatini.

“To our dear friends in Eswatini, with gratitude.”

This month we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Japan-Eswatini diplomatic relations. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty King Mswati III, to the officials of the Eswatini Government, and the people of Eswatini for their longstanding support for the development of the Japan-Eswatini friendship. We were honoured by the visit of His Majesty Mswati III to Japan in 2019, to attend the Ceremonies of the Accession to the Throne of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. Although we are not able to have a physical event at this stage, it is our pleasure to celebrate our 50th anniversary online.

As we mark a key milestone, I am deeply saddened by the absence of the late Prime Minister Ambrose Mandvulo Dlamini, who passed away just months ago. I remember very well the fruitful discussions he had with our Prime Minister when he last visited Japan in 2019. I will also never forget how warmly he welcomed members of the Japan-AU Parliamentary Friendship League who visited Eswatini last year. On this occasion, I would like to pay tribute to his great contributions to our bilateral relations and express my deepest condolences to the Government and to the family of the late Prime Minister. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences to those who lost members of their families, close relatives or friends due to COVID-19. I wish for the swiftest possible recovery of those who have been affected by the pandemic.

It has been one year since the first case of COVID-19 infection was detected in Eswatini. In response to the spread of COVID-19 infections, Japan decided last year to support Eswatini by providing health and medical equipment (blood gas analyzers and other equipment) worth about 100 million yen (about 15 million Emalangeni). We also decided to donate about 200 million yen (about 30 million Emalangeni) through the World Food Programme to improve food security in Eswatini. This year, we have decided to support vaccination efforts by providing cold-storage facilities and equipment worth about 12 million yen (about 1.6 million Emalangeni) to Eswatini, through UNICEF. We will continue to stand with the people of Eswatini and support Eswatini efforts to contain the pandemic.

The Government of Japan has been leading the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) since 1993, co-hosted by the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the African Union

Commission (AUC). TICAD is gaining further significance as a multilateral international conference to address various development issues in Africa, including in the area of health. We are honoured that His Majesty and high-ranking officials have attended TICAD meetings on many occasions. I would particularly like to express my gratitude for Eswatini's long-standing support for the TICAD process. One of the areas highlighted in the TICAD process is education, since education contributes to human resource development, employment promotion, and the economic development of the country. Improvement of human resources development also supports sustainable growth and poverty reduction. By implementing the commitment made through the TICAD process, Japan continues to help improve the learning environment of Eswatini by constructing secondary schools in all regions, including but not limited to classrooms, science laboratories, multipurpose laboratories.

The most recent such example is a grant of 1.723 billion yen to construct a secondary school, based on an inclusive education model, and to procure equipment to improve the learning environment for children with disabilities. This project was successfully completed last year. Japan has a strong belief in "No one should be left behind". For Eswatini, Japanese assistance focuses strongly on education, but the areas which impact the living standards of socially vulnerable groups are also of our concern. This is one of the reasons why Japan's assistance to Eswatini extends to other areas: basic sanitation, health, medical care, agriculture, and climate change countermeasures.

In the field of health and medical care, we have supported the building of resilient health and medical care systems based on the principle of human security, aiming to achieve universal health coverage. These efforts have also shown their true value in the response to containing COVID-19. In the area of agriculture, agreements for the transfer of agricultural equipment have been concluded. That equipment is expected to arrive in Eswatini this year, and we are very pleased to be able to continue to support Eswatini during this difficult time.

Eswatini is a beautiful country, very well situated geographically near the ports in South Africa and in Mozambique. It has well-maintained highways and a reliable and well-qualified labour force. It is reasonable to consider that Eswatini could become a manufacturing base and a hub to expand supply chains to the African continent and to the world, as the Japanese company YKK has been doing. In markets, if you look very closely, bags that have been made by women of Eswatini might have zippers engrossed with the logo "YKK": an example of beautiful harmony of Eswatini and Japanese craftsmanship. I hope that economic exchanges between our two countries will continue and will develop further in the future.

TICAD8 will be held in Tunisia next year. Looking ahead to this occasion, Japan renews its commitment to support African led development to address various challenges that have been brought to light by COVID-19 and to further strengthen the Japan-Eswatini bilateral relationship.

Japan wishes to walk together with Eswatini through the next 50 years and beyond as we enhance the ties built in the past 50 years. For that purpose, we would like to strengthen the bond between our two countries by maintaining and enhancing people-to-people exchanges and economic exchanges. I am counting down the days until we can resume in-person interactions between the people of our two nations by overcoming the pandemic together with the international community.