

Message from the Ambassador of Japan to the Kingdom of Lesotho
on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and
Lesotho

This month we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Japan-Lesotho diplomatic relations.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty King Letsie III, to the officials of the Lesotho Government, and to the people of Lesotho for their longstanding support for the development of the Japan-Lesotho friendship. We were honored by the visit of His Majesty King Letsie III to Japan in 2019 to attend the Ceremonies of the Accession to the Throne of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

It was in 2016 that His Majesty King Letsie III and Her Majesty Queen Masenate Mohato Seeiso paid their first visit to Japan. At this occasion, Their Majesties visited one of the areas heavily devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, Fukushima Prefecture. The tree that Their Majesties planted in Souma City continues to serve as a reminder, not just to people of Souma but all of us Japanese, of the warmth extended by Their Majesties and the people of Lesotho. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for Their Majesties' compassion for those who were affected by the disaster, as this year marked 10th year since it occurred. Fukushima prefecture and other areas have strongly recovered from the unprecedented disaster and are now hosting events such as softball and soccer matches of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Japan-Lesotho diplomatic relations, we face a big challenge in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic not allowing us to have a physical event at this time to celebrate the anniversary.

In Lesotho, it has been over a year since the first case of COVID-19 infection was detected. I would 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.

Japan decided last year to support Lesotho by providing health and medical equipment (ambulances and other equipment) worth about 15 million Loti. We also decided to provide food for primary school pupils (equivalent to about 30 million Loti) through the World Food Programme to improve food security in Lesotho. We will continue to stand with the people of Lesotho and support Lesotho's 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, the 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 development issues in Africa, including in the area of health. I would particularly like to express my gratitude for Lesotho's long-standing support for the TICAD process and high-level participation in TICAD meetings.

One of the areas highlighted in the TICAD process is education, since education contributes to human resources development, employment promotion, and 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 cooperate with Lesotho, focusing on these areas.

The most recent such example is a grant of about 280 million Loti to build new secondary schools, based on an inclusive education model, and to procure equipment to improve the learning environment for children with disabilities. Construction works of this project is scheduled to commence around December this year and is expected to be completed by 2023. Japan has a strong belief in "No one should be left behind".

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

Japan wishes to continue to walk together with Lesotho 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 enhancing people-to-people exchanges and economic relations. As a follow-up of TICAD, there have been more than 200 participants from Lesotho to Japan since 2007 in schemes such as the ABE Initiative and JICA training programmes. More recently, in addition to Their Majesties' visit to Japan, there have been high-level exchanges such as the visit to Japan by a delegation from Lesotho led by the Prime Minister to participate in TICAD7 in Yokohama, in 2019, and a visit to Lesotho in early 2020 by Japanese parliamentarians who represent the Japan-AU Parliamentary Friendship League.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, which started on 23 July 2021, will serve as the first and excellent opportunity this year to have such exchanges. I wish all the best for

Team Lesotho who will participate in the Games. The Olympic and Paralympic Games have the power to unite the hearts of people the world over. Now more than ever as we face the enormous hardship of COVID-19 do we want to send out from Tokyo the messages of the world being able to come together as one and of being able to overcome hardships thanks to the efforts and wisdom of humankind as a whole. The Government of Japan will do its utmost to prevent infections and to make the Games successful.

By overcoming COVID-19 together, I am counting down the days until we can resume in-person interactions between the people of our two nations.