

Speech by Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Mitsunari Okamoto at the Japan-Africa Public-Private Economic Forum

Thank you for your introduction. It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this first important meeting of the Japan-Africa Public-Private Economic Forum. I am also very delighted to see this conference room filled with business executives from both Africa and Japan, who are eager to press forward with their partnership.

Opening up new business frontiers is a process that is basically led by the initiatives of private sector and entrepreneurs themselves. Yet the role of governments is critical since the use of technology and innovation that drives new businesses could be facilitated by governments. Also, business-friendly environment depends largely on overall conditions of the economy, governance, human resources and infrastructure, supported by state policies.

As many of you are aware, TICAD process is at the center of Japan's diplomacy towards Africa. The first pillar of the TICAD VI Nairobi Declaration, adopted by the heads of States and Governments in

2016, namely, “promoting structural economic transformation through economic diversification and industrialization” is precisely about creating an enabling business environment needed in this context.

Japan is committed to promoting private sector activities through human resource development and productivity improvement. We also provide support for strengthening connectivity by promoting quality infrastructure investment.

Japan’s core contribution is targeted at the creation of tomorrow’s talent, development of quality infrastructure and promotion of social stability.

Human resource development is a prerequisite for achieving self-sustained development. That’s why Japan is promoting development of human resources that truly match labor market demand, under the ABE Initiative, “African Business Education Initiative for Youth”. The underlying concept of the ABE Initiative, since its inception in TICAD V in 2013, is “education with an exit”. We

have been offering opportunities for young Africans to study in Master's courses at Japanese universities and to intern in Japanese companies during their stay in Japan. The trainees can effectively develop practical skills and knowledge needed for the industrial development in Africa. Some former trainees are already playing important roles in businesses that connect Japan and Africa.

With respect to our efforts to enhance region-wide connectivity, Japan announced at TICADVI to implement quality infrastructure investment of approximately 10 billion USD. Let me emphasize the importance of promoting infrastructure development in accordance with international standards and in such a way that ensures economic viability and fiscal soundness. Infrastructure development fosters a long lasting relationship between the partners involved. I hope that our partnership will be further strengthened through quality infrastructure development, bringing Japan and Africa closer at all levels including Government to Government, business to business and people to people.

Efforts for shared prosperity should not be hindered by security concerns. Japan considers peace and security as the prerequisite for sustainable development. We have been assisting capacity building in the area including security, counter-terrorism and providing vocational training and job opportunities in the conflict-affected regions. It goes without saying that social stability and safety are among the key factors for any investor in deciding a foreign direct investment.

Trade and investment, well recognized engines for growth, contribute significantly to the transfer of technology and knowledge. In particular, foreign direct investment is a major channel for technology transfer. Foreign firms can offer capital, technology and know-how, and can contribute to the improvement of local capabilities of workers which can thereafter spread locally.

To raise the profile of Africa as an attractive investment destination, much still needs to be done. Good governance, diversified economy, predictability, transparency, basic infrastructure and social stability

are keys to promoting investment. I would also like to strongly encourage those Governments wishing to host more investment to further their efforts in these areas. In this regard, I am encouraged by the recent initiatives of some African leaders, including President Ramaphosa's new Investment Drive in South Africa and President Akufo-Addo's initiative to develop a business-friendly economy in Ghana.

Japan is of the belief that a key for stability and prosperity of the international community is the dynamism brought forth by connecting the two most vibrant and promising continents on the globe, Asia and Africa. Under this "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy", Japan hopes to maintain and strengthen the rules-based, free and open maritime order in the waters around us, and make it a global commons that brings stability and prosperity to all countries without discrimination.

Africa is a continent full of hope. Japan looks forward to contributing to realize Africa's aspirations as reflected in Agenda 2063, by

enhancing its partnership with Africa, in both public and private sectors, through inclusive, transparent and participatory TICAD process.