

Statement by H. E. Mr. KONO Taro,  
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan,  
at the Special Conference on Promoting Cooperation  
in the Western Indian Ocean  
on August 30, 2019 in Yokohama

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great honor to welcome the representatives from the countries of the Western Indian Ocean region, and those from our partners, at this meeting.

The Western Indian Ocean region embraces critical sea lanes connecting Asia, Africa and Europe, and constitutes a promising area of Blue Economy. The African Continental Free Trade Area will further boost the region's economic growth soon.

Multilateral frameworks show vibrant performance in this region as well: the AU's Blue Economy architecture, the

Indian Ocean Commission, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, and more recently the Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean in Mauritius. Today's Special Conference would be a precious occasion to add further momentum to such frameworks by linking them to TICAD initiatives.

I also recall that at TICADVI in Nairobi, Prime Minister Abe announced Japan's vision of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific". Free and Open Indo-Pacific consists of three pillars: establishment of the rule of law including freedom of navigation, pursuit of economic prosperity, and commitment for peace and stability.

The Western Indian Ocean is located exactly at the crossroads between the two continents, Asia and Africa, and thus is an integral component of Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Japan addresses the challenges of the region in the following four areas.

First is to mitigate the vulnerabilities of island countries, such as climate change, natural disasters and ocean pollution. As an island nation, Japan has rich experience in supporting such countries. Japan has provided meteorological radar system to Mauritius, accompanied by capacity building programs to cope with climate change and natural disasters. Japan will continue to support the island countries' efforts to deal with such global challenges.

Second is to invest in quality infrastructure. Japan constructed seawalls surrounding the Malé Island, which saved the capital of the Maldives from the devastating Tsunami in 2004. Japan also helps build facilities and major ports in the region such as Mombasa, Nacala and Toamasina and promote regional connectivity through quality infrastructure. Such infrastructure projects should be pursued in accordance with international standards on quality infrastructure such as openness, transparency,

economic efficiency and debt sustainability, as stressed in the newly endorsed G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment. Japan will continue to support countries in the region to deal with the debt issue by dispatching financial advisors and preparing training courses.

Third is to ensure sustainable use of marine resources. Japan, for instance, in collaboration with FAO, supports the Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles in capacity building and provides patrol boats and other equipment to fishing communities in East African countries in order to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing, as well as to improve their livelihoods and food security. I also encourage more countries in the region to join the Agreement on Port State Measures, in order to deter, prevent and eliminate IUU fishing.

The last area is to ensure a free and open maritime order in

the Western Indian Ocean. Japan has deployed the Self Defense Forces and taken part in the Combined Task Force for the anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. Japan launches multi-faceted cooperation such as providing patrol vessels and maritime security equipment, conducting training with help of Japan Coast Guard, in order to help the Comoros, Madagascar, the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and other countries in the region tackle piracy and transnational crimes. Japan will also host the UN Crime Congress in Kyoto next April to address terrorism and organized crimes, including maritime crimes.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to emphasize that a free and open maritime order is global public goods and common interests wherever we are. Looking to East Asia, we are now facing serious challenges, such as unilateral attempts to change the *status quo* in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. The international community should

raise its voice to ensure the peace and stability of our ocean through promoting the rules-based maritime order.

As a token of Japan's commitment to the Western Indian Ocean region, I reiterate Japan's willingness to become an observer of the IOC. Lastly, I envisage that our discussion today will lead to successful TICAD 7 and more synergy among the stakeholders.

Thank you very much for your participation.