

## “Japan and Africa: Always with Smiles”

—TICAD IV - Goodwill Ambassador Mayu Tsuruta—

Ms. Mayu Tsuruta, an actress and Goodwill Ambassador for the 4th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) spoke in an interview on her experience as Ambassador.

**- As TICAD IV Goodwill Ambassador, you visited Kenya and southern Sudan in April 2008. What impressions did the tour leave you?**

The strongest impression was made on me when I spoke with a counselor at a camp for internally displaced persons in Kenya. She told me about children who were mentally hurt by the experiences they had had in riots. She said, “We must relieve the children of their trauma before their sadness turns to hatred. Otherwise, this negative history will repeat itself. Aid supplies such as food and clothes can be received quickly, but mental care is often late to reach the recipients. Even though children do not understand the situation they are placed in, they will be included into hatred as they grow up. And the hatred can end up triggering another conflict.” Listening to her accounts, I realized that mental care is something that touches the very core of preventing and solving conflicts. I am convinced that we need care for these invisible aspects as well as visible ones.

**- During your tour in Africa, you also visited sites for Japanese aid activities and met people working there. What impressions did you get in those places?**

In southern Sudan, I observed a training facility run by JICA, and realized the importance of technical cooperation. Currently, in southern Sudan the conflict has been overcome, and its reconstruction process has been in progress. So the facility offers job training for people to start up new lives, such as building houses with bricks and wiring of the electricity for households. I was impressed by the people trained there, who were concentrating in a straightforward and earnest manner on their training, at a time when they must be experiencing great hardship to confront surviving amidst these harsh realities.

When I spoke with the staff on the job training programs, I felt that they were working hand in hand with local residents based on the good relationships they had created there. In fact, wherever I visited, I was welcomed by smiles of the local people, and children spoke to me with cheerful expressions on their faces. I felt that the kindness and strength of African people had opened the hearts of the Japanese staff who were working on the ground.

**- Having served as TICAD IV Goodwill Ambassador, what do you think will be necessary to support Africa in the time ahead?**

During the time when TICAD IV was held, I had a chance to talk with Ms. Wangari Muta Maathai, a Nobel Peace Prize winner from Kenya. Ms. Maathai thinks and acts, keeping in perspective the whole of Africa, the world, and the planet where the natural environment is being destroyed. She made me feel that Africa was striving to rise on its own. At the same time, I came to see some of the gaps that have existed between the aid policies planned by developed countries and the aid expected by developing countries.

Immediately after conflicts and chaos have snatched away everything, the emergency assistance such as food aid is required. Once the confusion settles down, the community requires supports to build a base for individual lives. When assisting them, we should organize the “future-oriented help.” What I mean is that, even if people initially need

others' help to start their lives over, our support should aim to enable them to manage their lives on their own. That's where I believe we should be heading to. Also, I believe that what is most important to this end is interactive communication, which helps us clearly understand what our partners need now.



Talks with Ms. Naomi Shaban, Minister of Special Programs, Office of the President, Kenya



In the outskirts of Juba, Southern Sudan

