

A New Chapter of Japan–Sudan Relation and the Growing Japan–Africa Partnership: Japanese National Day Remark from Ambassador Hattori

The 23rd of February marks the 61st birthday of His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito. I would like to seize this opportunity to felicitate the anniversary for His Majesty and to share my wish for the long prosperity of our country and the royal family. In commemoration of this celebratory day, I, as an ambassador of Japan to Sudan, would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the friends in Sudan who support and cooperate with Japan, as well as to the international partners with whom we strive to achieve our common goal to better develop Sudan and Africa.

The political and socioeconomic landscape of recent Sudan is changing ever rapidly. The removal of its name from the SSTL in December evidences the endeavours of Sudanese transitional government from its sprout in 2019. The ongoing governmental reforms in the framework of debt relief process also symbolises its determination to bring the country back again to the international arena in order to obtain wider opportunities for multi-year development aids and loans. Despite the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sudan has been marching toward its new era.

Undoubtedly, with the gradual reintegration of Sudan into the international economic and financial stage, a positive momentum to revitalize the trans-border business activities with Sudan is beginning to be seen among a number of countries. Once the stigmatised image completely vanishes, many private companies from the world would start to look Sudan as a lucrative trade and investment destination. As Sudan is blessed with its vast land for agricultural production and with other natural resources – needless to mention about its abundant labour power – a lot of global merchants have started casting a desirous eyes on a promised profit from their early investment to this country.

Japan of course is no exception. The majority of Japanese firms had not shown great interest in having direct transactions with Sudan and its domestic private sectors during the era of the former regime. However, after the fall of this old regime and especially with the deletion from SSTL, our Embassy has received many inquiries from Japanese companies who are willing to expand its reach to Sudan. Since there are a

number of entrepreneurs in this country who are catching up with or even well exceeding the international standards, when the structural problems are resolved, I see a vast chance of facilitating Japanese private firms to form partnerships with the local enterprises and I deem it as my duty to bridge vigorous collaborations between them.

It is true that there still remains much to be addressed and improved in Sudan, such as the reform in foreign exchange transaction system, in order to create a conducive business environment to attract FDI. However, Japan appreciates the tenacious efforts by the Transitional Government, though wrenching, to push through various reforms for the sake of the future development of this country. In this regard, we welcome the current move in domestic legislative revamp like the amendment bill of Investment Act, which is now under the discussion. We hope that it satisfy the criteria of the foreign investors and be rigidly implemented.

Moreover, we are pleased to observe the enormous success of the Transitional Government in the peace process by signing the Juba Peace Agreement last October. We expect the comprehensive peace agreement be concluded in an inclusive manner in the near future to put the internal fighting to an end eternally. Sudan is now in the face of some newly emerging humanitarian challenges such as COVID-19, influx of the Ethiopian refugees, and concerns about increasing security risk in Darfur after the withdrawal of UNAMID. In addition to the recent provision of 3.3 million USD to UNHCR and WFP for the response to the Ethiopian refugee crisis, the Government of Japan decided to fund 10 international humanitarian projects with the total amount of approximately 16 million USD. With their focus on the COVID-19 prevention measures, Japanese donated projects will cover a wide range of urgent humanitarian activities, such as emergency food, water, sanitation and shelter provision to people at risks, as well as refugees, IDPs and other vulnerable population. The budget is also going to contribute to the operational upgrading for the Sudan Family Support Programme. Some projects also will offer urgent skill trainings or the creation of job opportunities for the realization of development-humanitarian nexus, envisaging the better and sustainable development of this country.

As for our bilateral support to Sudan, it is worthwhile to mention about the commencement of three grant projects. One aims at enhancing the maintenance and coordination capability for the water supply agencies with the budget of 9.6 million

USD. We are also going to provide 11.8 million USD for the waste management project through which we procure waste collection vehicles and other facilitative improvements. Last but not least, as there is a growing demand for emergency health service in Sudan whose medical capacity is at the near verge of collapsing in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, we are offering ambulances and vaccine delivery cars for 2.85 million USD.

Enlarging our scope to the entire continent, the relation between Japan and Africa is fast evolving. From last December, Japanese Foreign Minister Mr. Motegi has visited six African countries, namely Tunisia, Mozambique, South Africa, Mauritius, Senegal and Kenya, for the first time after he took office as Minister for Foreign Affairs. With all governments, Japan agreed to cooperate on the realization of the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” vision, the strategic policy which connects the growing continents of Asia and Africa through 1) the promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade; 2) the pursuit of economic prosperity; and 3) the commitment for peace and stability. Furthermore, as Japan and all African economies were heavily damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, all governments assented to further strengthen the business connection with each other to reinvigorate their economic relations in the post-COVID context. In this regard, Japan announced to send public-private missions and to hold business dialogues with some of the above-mentioned states.

More multilaterally speaking, the 8th Tokyo International Conference on African Development – shortened as TICAD8 where the policies for comprehensive development and the expansion of business exchanges between the globe and Africa will be heatedly discussed – is planned to be held in 2022 in Tunisia. Japanese Government has been appealing to the African nations to work together to share the universal values as well as to reconfirm the motivation of growth. On the last TICAD7 in 2019, former Prime Minister Abe launched the “New Approach for Peace and Stability in Africa” under which Japan commits to assist in making judicial, governmental administration and legislative systems stable and secure. As the materialisation of peace is an underlying condition for Africa both to self-nurture and to bolster its business with abroad, how to unleash this continent from the perpetuating security concerns will be a continuous focus of Japanese assistance to Africa, and I am sure that this is the exact approach needed to be implemented when addressing issues now facing the transitional period in Sudan. Now that Africa is casting off its conventional misnomer as the thorough recipient of benevolent supports

and unveiling itself as a productive business partner, I am sure that our commitment to the stabilisation of this entire continent will have a huge positive impact not only on African countries but also on the entire world economy.

The spectre of the deadly virus is still haunting the globe, and recovery of those who incurred the damage in terms not just of their health but also of their livelihoods and businesses is the most crucial issue for the year of 2021. With patience and solid determination, humanity can surely overcome this predicament, and at the time of this hardship, the international cooperation is weighing its importance. The government of Japan will continuously commit to the sustainable growth and quality development of Africa through all available windows. I am concluding my remark with a promise that Japan will play both roles as a reliable development and humanitarian supporter and as a business and investment partner to Sudan for its prosperous future.

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