

Excellence Monsieur Samuel MVONDO AYOLO, Directeur du Cabinet Civil de la Présidence de la République,
Excellences Mesdames et Messieurs les Ministres,
Honorables invités,
Mesdames et Messieurs,
Chers amis,

Mon épouse et moi-même sommes heureux de vous accueillir et de vous recevoir dans ce cadre chaleureux, pour partager avec vous un moment de fraternité et de convivialité, à l'occasion de la réception célébrant le 63 anniversaire de Sa Majesté l'Empereur du Japon, qui aura lieu demain le 23 février 2023 ou aujourd'hui au Japon parce qu'il y a le décalage horaire de 8 heures entre deux pays.

Avant de continuer, permettez-moi d'adresser mes sincères remerciements à Son Excellence Monsieur Paul Biya, pour la cérémonie de présentation des vœux de Nouvel An du 06 janvier cette année, au cours de laquelle j'ai eu l'immense honneur de le rencontrer, et à Mme Chantal BIYA, l'épouse de Monsieur le Président, qui nous a fait l'honneur d'inviter et de recevoir mon épouse le lendemain, pour une cérémonie similaire. Je profite de cette occasion pour souhaiter un bon anniversaire à Son Excellence Monsieur Paul Biya, qui a célébré ses 90 ans.

Aujourd'hui, je voudrais vous présenter les événements importants survenus l'année dernière. Pour gagner du temps, je ferai ma présentation en anglais, car mon français n'est pas le meilleur. Pour la version en français, je vous prie de regarder sur l'écran.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me thank the most precious and kind attendance of His Excellency, Samuel MVONDO AYOLO, Director of the Civil Cabinet of the Presidency of the Republic, representing the Cameroonian Government. His Excellency has always been important bridge between presidency and the Embassys including Japanese Embassy, and I would seek your continued support in the future.

Since the enthronement of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito to the imperial throne on May 1, 2019, this is actually the second time we hold a reception in honor of his birthday for the obvious reason, because of COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, we are three times more pleased and honored to welcome you to this important celebration.

Important, because today is a great opportunity for me to review and recognize so many events that took place in the past year in the context of Japan-Cameroon relations, as well as so many important roles played by precious Cameroonian friends of Japan.

The 8th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 8) was held in Tunis in August, reaffirming Japanese support to African development. Japan will invest 30 billion US\$ in total both in the form of public and private contribution. I take this opportunity to thank His Excellency Lejeune MBELLA MBELLA, the Minister of External Relations, and incidentally former Cameroonian Ambassador to Japan for his participation in that conference.

In the MINREX, we have other strong Japanese friends His Excellency MBAYU Felix, Minister delegate of the Ministry of External Relations. I know that, Your Excellency, once enjoyed working in Tokyo as counsellor of Cameroonian embassy in Japan. He is always willing to receive me at the MINREX to discuss issues of our mutual concern and I am very grateful for that.

This year, I expect that we will have more diplomatic opportunities like that because Japan holds the presidency of G7 in 2023 and I seek Your Excellency's kind support in advance.

As Japan aspires to be "a partner growing together with Africa", Cameroonian partnership is very important for us. As I will explain later, Cameroon is a leading partner of Japan on the African Continent in the important fields of development.

UN agencies are also important partners of Japan in the formation and implementation of cooperative projects in Cameroon.

In April last year, I was with Ms. Nadine PERRAULT, the Resident Representative of UNICEF to handover vaccines against COVID-19 donated by Japan through the COVAX Facility at the vaccine warehouse of the Ministry of Public Health. I would like to thank His Excellency MANAOUDA MALACHIE, the Minister of Public Health for his personal support for the ceremony.

In May, this time I was with Mr. Abdel Rahmane DIOP, chief of the Mission of International Organisation of Migration to release the “Labour Market Survey in North- West, South-West Regions of Cameroon for the Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus” at the seminar chaired by His Excellency TASONG NJUKANG Paul, Minister delegate at MINEPAT in charge of Planning, who kindly emphasized the usefulness of this Japan funded market research.

In the same vein, I would like to express my appreciation to the Heads of international organizations for their constant collaboration with Japan, because as you can see, while my staff can be counted by fingers, you have tens and hundreds of professional and experienced staff. My special thanks also goes to Mr. Matthias NAAB, UN Resident Coordinator, who always provide me with helpful and useful support and information. Happily the list is very long and please note that order will not reflect anything. Ms. Wanja Kaaria Ndoho of WFP, Mr. Olivier Guillaume BEER of UNHCR, Mr. Athman MRAVILI of FAO, Ms. RAKY CHAUPIN of UN Women, Dr. Phaniel Habimana of WHO, Mr. Paul Coustère of UNESCO, Mr. Raymond TAVARES of UNIDO, Mr. NGUESSAN Koffi of UNFPA, Mr. Nicholas STAINES of IMF, Mr. ADESH TRIPATHEE of IFRC, Mr. Stephane BONAMY of ICRC, Ms. Elisabeth Huybens of World bank.

The list cannot be completed without mentioning our collaboration with UNDP Mr Alassane BA, the Resident Representative a.i., and its former resident representative Jean Luc Stalon. Actually, I met him last month in Bangui where he serves now. I would like to thank Her Excellency Jeannette Marcelle GOTCHANGA, Ambassador of The Central African Republic for the arrangement of my trip.

One year ago last February, immediately after my arrival in Yaoundé, Mr. Stalon and I signed "Project for Improving Infrastructure for Stabilization of the Lake Chad Basin Area" with the presence of Mr. Midjiyawa Bakari, the Governor of the Far North Region.

Japan is also implementing Project for recovery in the South-West Regions with UNDP. I would like to take this opportunity to confirm that Japan's assistance is not politically motivated, but aims to contribute to the livelihood and welfare of the local people and the decision on whether or not to provide assistance is made in collaboration with UN agencies on a project-by-project basis.

On the Cameroonian government side, I would like to thank His Excellency Joseph DION NGUTE, the Prime Minister, for his wise guidance, and Mr. BALUNGELI EBUNE Confiance, the Director of Cabinet of Prime Minister, who is with us today, for his support in the Prime Minister's office. When it comes to concluding contracts on our cooperative projects, most recently on the grant aid project for forest monitoring equipment, I always depend upon His Excellency Alamine OUSMANE MEY, the Minister of Economy, Planning and Regional Development, and I am very grateful for his kind assistance.

In the field of fisheries, the construction of the fish market in Youpwe in Douala is in its final stage. I accompanied His Excellency Dr. TAIGA, the Minister of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries, to observe the progress at the project site in August last year, and I understood the future impact of this important infrastructure in improving the income of the fisheries workers and in realizing a stable supply of seafood products that meet the health standards. I take this opportunity to thank once again to Dr. TAIGA for personal guidance.

Inland fisheries is another area where Japanese experts, Mr. OGISO Tateharu is exploring new possibilities to expand the horizon for Cameroonian fish industry.

Administration and implementation of these bilateral Japan-Cameroonian cooperative projects have been smoothly conducted by the JICA office in Cameroon. In this regard, I would like to thank Mr. KAGEYAMA Tadashi, the Resident Representative of JICA, Ms. HANAI Akane, the Deputy Resident Representative and their staff as well as 20 young Japanese volunteers currently dispatched to various parts of this country.

In addition to those projects that I mentioned which require formal procedures by the Japanese Government in its headquarters in Tokyo, our Embassy administers micro-projects financed under the "KUSANONE" program.

Last year, the Project for Construction of storey building for MOUNT ZION Nursery and Primary School in Southwest Region was completed. I would like to thank Mr. Lionel Penehnjo Songweh, President of The Light House association for his efforts in bringing this project to fruition.

There is another project for the construction of a cocoa processing unit in Ebolowa 2. I would like to thank Mr. André Thomas BENGON, the Mayor of Ebolowa 2, as well as His Excellency Luc Magloire MBARGAATANGANA, the Minister of Trade, who was kind enough to take part in the signing ceremony of the grant contract for this project last March in my residence.

Next month I will ask my deputy, Mr. IKEDA Kiyohiko to attend the handover ceremony of water tower and development of the the CEBEC school of Babouantou Tonko, in the Western region. I thank Mr. Laurent TCHANDEU, President of the Association for the Support of Schooling in Babouantou for his cooperation.

December last year, Mr. IKEDA also signed the donation contract for the project to install a mobile tuberculosis screening system in the Northern Region, in the presence of Professor Louis Richard NJOCK, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Public Health, as well as Ms. Melissa SANDER, the Director of the Centre of Health Promotion and Research, and Mr. Denis Zapulla, the General Manager of CAMI TOYOTA, whose company will provide the necessary equipment for this project.

After two days, on February 24, I am looking forward to proceeding with another handing over ceremony with Ms. Habissou BIDOUNG MKPATT, the Secretary General of the Chantal BIYA Foundation, to complete the Newborn Survival Project by supplying eight incubators, two phototherapy tunnels, a hematology machine and a semi-automatic immuno-analysis machine.

Now, I would like to focus upon Cameroonian leadership on the African Continent as I indicated at the beginning of my speech on two important projects.

The first one is KAIZEN Project. Kaizen in Japanese means literary improvement which made Toyota No.1 automobile producer in the world, for example. But the important point is that this movement to improve comes from the bottom of the organization, such as assembly line workers and shop assistants, not from the top. Therefore, successful Kaizen requires good management-employee relations and democracy in company culture.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that Japan found the best partner of Kaizen practice on the African continent in Cameroon. There are only two Japanese Kaizen Centers in Africa, Cameroon and Kenya, but Cameroonian center is producing much more successful Kaizen specialists than Kenya. In this regard, I would like to thank His Excellency Achille BASSILEKIN III, the Minister of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts, for his unfailing support to this project.

I am pleased to inform you that the winners of the prestigious Africa Kaizen Awards 2022, MAKO INDUSTRIES, is represented by Mr. Gide KOUATCHOU, the CEO of that company. When you finish eating and drinking, you can visit the exhibition in the hall overthere when he can explain what Kaizen means to you, I hope.

In that hall, you can also find Yamaha exhibition, you might wonder they are not motorcycles, when Toyota is displaying cars overther, but Yamaha is also expanding its water purification systems in Asia and Africa. And here in Africa, including 20 African countries, such as Senegal and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I am happy to have Mr. FUJIMOTO Akimasa, supervisor of Yamaha, currently visiting Cameroon is ready to answer any questions you might have. I am looking forward to discuss when it's ready with His Excellency Gaston ELOUNDOU ESSOMBA, Minister of Energy and Water Resources.

Let me also mention that Cami Toyota, CFAO and TMT are also displaying their exhibitions, so please have a look. Cami Toyota, maybe I don't need any introduction. You can just see Japanese cars over there. CFAO is now owned 100% by Japanese Company Toyota Tsusho. So you should know that this new shopping center Playce in Warda is a joint product of Japan and France.

TMT is a company in Oita in Japan where the Cameroonian national team camped during FIFA 2002 world cup. They are eager to do business in Cameroon are trying to find a good partner.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my special and profound gratitude to His Excellency Ferdinand NGOH NGOH, Minister of State, Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic for his presence on 5 July 2022, at the official inauguration ceremony of the Playce Yaounde shopping centre, as the representative of His Excellency Paul BIYA, President of the Republic and emphasize the significance of this Cameroon-Japan-France link.

Another important project where Cameroon plays leading role on the African Continent is rice production. Yesterday, I attended the opening ceremony of the Training Seminar on Rice Cultivation for Francophone Countries 2023 here in Yaoundé with the participation from 7 African countries. The project for the development of irrigated and rainfed rice cultivation (PRODERIP) achieved great results in improved quality and increased yield and sale of rice. I would like to thank His Excellency Gabriel MBAIROBE, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Mr. ONDOA MANGA Tobie, Director of Studies, Programs and Cooperation, for their support and recognize the excellent work of Mr. SOKEI and his Japanese team.

By the way, have you already tried new sushi bar opened recently on the 11th floor of Yaoundé Hilton? My wife and I enjoyed the other day and we highly appreciate the great investment made by General Director of Hilton, Mr. Julien BESANCON. And of course, we also appreciate his excellent arrangement of this reception.

Equally good is the sushi prepared by my chef using the rice grown in NDOP through the project PRODERIP, that I explained. The brand name of the rice is “Diamond” rice, available at the Carrefour supermarket in Warda. I hope you will enjoy the sushi that embodies the cooperative mix of Japan and Cameroon.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The strengthening of inter-parliamentary cooperation is also a great achievement of the past year. I would like to thank Honorable Laurentine KOA MFEGUE, the newly appointed President of the Cameroon-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group of the National Assembly, for her initiative to reinvigorate the inter-parliamentary exchange. It was a great honor and pleasure for me to convey to you, last January, the congratulatory message from the chairman of the Japan-Cameroon Parliamentary Friendship Association, Honorable ETO Seishiro, in which he expressed his ardent wish to work with you to promote parliamentary exchanges and strengthen friendship between Japan and Cameroon.

In the field of sports, I was delighted to attend with His Excellency Narcisse MOUELLE KOMBI, the Minister of Sports and Physical Education the inauguration ceremony of the national dojo in Soa last September. I commend Mr. Alain Christian KINGUE DIHANG, the President of the Judo Federation, for his initiatives in promoting judo values in Cameroon.

Just last week, the first Judo tournament entitled "Ambassador's Cup" was held in the national dojo. Together with Honourable Laurentine KOA MFEGUE I congratulate the team of winner of this tournament, PANTHERS YAOUND. We have its coach, Mr. DJOKO Alain, and Mr. MEPOUI ANONG Daniel, captain of this team with us today. Thank you very much for spreading Japanese judo and samurai spirit.

Speaking of sports, the 2022 World Cup is a topic that cannot be avoided. I was impressed by the Indomitable Lions who narrowly failed to qualify for the second round of the competition, despite a resounding victory over Brazil. I would like to pay tribute to all the Cameroonian athletes who played in the World Cup and mention the coach of the national soccer team of Cameroon, Mr. Rigobert SONG BAHANAG, who was among those very popular Cameroonian National Team camped in Nakatsue Oita during FIFA World Cup 2002, 21 years ago.

Finally, let commend my wife who prepared Japanese Ikebana beside me and at the receiving line and on the table in this hall. She volunteered to venture creating combination of Cameroonian plants and flowers arranged in Japanese way. I hope you would appreciate what the combination of Japanese and Cameroonian culture could create.

Talking about Japanese and Cameroonian culture, I would like to share the story of Mr. Rene HOSHINO, a Cameroonian boy grew up in Japan and now a famous comic artist. For this reception, Mr. HOSHINO has kindly contributed with his self-introduction comic now on the screen. You can also see this comic on paper at the JICA's exhibition booth outside this hall. I would like to thank this young artist because he had shed a light on a moving story about how no-Japanese boys and girls have overcome the difficulty of growing up in Japan as a foreigner at first, but and became a proud adult. I would like to recognize his proud mother Mrs. HOSHINO borned ELLA NTOUTOUMOU Dalina, and his proud uncle Mr. NDONGO Martin.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I was able to commend and recognize so many people. This is a great symbol of how our cooperation has been strengthened in the past year.

Let me propose to raise your glasses in honor of His Majesty NARUHITO, Emperor of Japan, and His Excellency President Paul BIYA, and the eternal friendship between Japan and Cameroon.

Cheers, Kampai !