



Happy New Year!

Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic caused tremendous economic and social damage to the entire world. Japan and Ethiopia were no exceptions. The movement of people across international borders has been drastically reduced, and traditional face-to-face ways of starting a new business or gaining new knowledge and experiences have been severely restricted. Although the pandemic has led some businesses and services to establish or expand their online presence, and new methods of working, including working from home, have expanded, the importance of meeting someone in person and gaining a better understanding of that person through direct conversation has not changed. As the appearance and rapid spread of variants of COVID-19 have been confirmed, it seems that we will be living with COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. Thus, please take thorough measures to avoid contracting COVID-19, while being aware that we are not only responsible for our own lives by protecting ourselves, but also for the lives of others, by working hard not to contract COVID-19 and spread it to others.

In Ethiopia, many Japanese people returned to Japan, beginning last March, to take refuge due to the COVID-19 pandemic but they have gradually started to come back to Ethiopia since autumn. In order to recover the time lost last year, we expect to strengthen our relations with Ethiopia in the fields of trade, investment, and economic cooperation, and the Embassy of Japan will work together with our Ethiopian counterparts to further these objectives.

Also in Ethiopia, a series of events have taken place, including the damage caused by a desert locust infestation, historical floods, political insurgencies, confrontations between various ethnic groups, and the law-enforcement activities carried out by the Ethiopian Government in the Tigray Region in November. These events are not confined to the past. The swarms of desert locusts, which formed in Eastern and Southern Ethiopia towards the end of last year, are predicted to cause enormous damage to crops again this year. Therefore, preventative measures are extremely important. The protection of refugees, IDPs and returnees, as well as the reconstruction and reconciliation after the law-enforcement activities carried out in

Tigray continue to pose significant challenges. Furthermore, the general election will take place in June. The ballot boxes, the provision of which is part of Japan's electoral assistance, have already arrived in Ethiopia. In addition, just before the election is to take place, special ink donated by Japan for the registration of voters is expected to arrive. Japan continues to provide humanitarian assistance, through various UN agencies, to the most vulnerable people in Ethiopia, including refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities. Furthermore, as part of the New Approach for Peace and Stability in Africa (NAPSA) introduced during the 7th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD7), Japan, along with other relevant stakeholders, will cooperate in order to further peace in Africa. Japan is working to establish and expand peace in Africa through, for example, its assistance to the Peace Keeping Center (PKC) in Addis Ababa (the International Peace Support Training Institute (IPSTI)) and its programmes promoting peace education through UNESCO.

11 March of this year will mark the tenth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Since the disaster took the lives of more than 19,000 people, with more than 2,500 people still classified as missing, Japan has learned many lessons, including the importance of prompt and wide-ranging responses to disasters, assistance to those who have been affected, and education for disaster risk reduction, which have allowed us to move forward with reconstruction. This year, Japan will host The Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, and they are being regarded as the "Recovery Olympics and Paralympics", which will serve as opportunities to express our gratitude for all the assistance, received from around the world, and to demonstrate the ongoing recovery of disaster-stricken areas to the world.

The Tokyo Games will also be held as a proof that humankind has defeated the COVID-19. Although the Games were postponed for one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an international gymnastics competition was held last November, with the participation of athletes from various foreign countries, which gave us a glimmer of hope. With three visions for the Tokyo Games, namely: "Achieving Personal Best", "Unity in Diversity" and "Connecting to Tomorrow", we sincerely hope the Tokyo Games will be the most innovative in the history of the Olympic games and bring about positive change to the world.

This is also the year that the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will start functioning, which is expected to promote trade and economic growth among African countries. Moreover, the ministerial meeting to prepare for TICAD8 is also expected to take place this year. We sincerely hope that the new steps Japan is taking in the upcoming year will further strengthen the relationship between Japan and Africa.

According to the Japanese zodiac, this year is the year of the ox. The ox walks slowly, but is working all the time and makes steady progress, one step after another, until it eventually arrives at its goal. While there are many uncertainties surrounding us, including COVID-19, we should also pay close attention and make steady moves forward, one step at a time.



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