

Presentation by Naito Yasushi, Consul-General of Japan in Perth at Luncheon
hosted by the Kangaeru Paw Group on 6 th July 2023

1 Introduction

Mrs. Mutsuko Bonnardeaux, esteemed members Kangaeru Paw group and friends,

Thank you for inviting Harumi and I for this event, and offering me the opportunity to share my experience and insights I had in South Africa, and Africa. I will try to make it useful in the context of Australia Japan relations.

I served in South Africa as a diplomat for a total of 21 years intermittently since 1987, both in Pretoria and in Cape Town. My interactions with South Africa has been 36 years thus far, more than one third of 105 years of official relations between Japan and South Africa since 1918.

2 Rugby World Cup Magic in 2019

In 2019, a year before I left South Africa, I had a privilege of being part of three visits of President Cyril Ramaphosa to Japan: G20 Osaka Summit, TICAD 7 and the Rugby World Cup final. It was my honour to have served as the liaison officer for the President for all three times. This was the very first time South African President visited Japan 3 times within a year.

The climax of the visits was the dramatic victory of the Springboks at the Rugby World Cup final in Yokohama. It was truly a magical moment. I could feel the mutual respect of South Africans and Japanese reached the highest point in the history, while Springboks learned to bow deeply and Japanese learned to sing South African National Anthem. Japan's long cherished rugby dream came true by embracing people from around the world and by playing a quarter final against South Africa, the champion team. There could not be a better outcome than this.

In the pre-match meeting, I witnessed President Ramaphosa addressed the Springboks saying, "Play your best rugby you will never forget in your life, that is all I want". "I do not say you must win but you must know that 60 million South Africans are behind you and you will probably not encounter with the same privilege in your life again."

The players looked solemn, calm and gazing into distance. But when they started the final, they were so different, compared to previous games. They exerted everything right from the beginning, causing a lot of injuries to both sides.

Captain Siya Kolisi said unity with a positive spirit and extensive effort can achieve almost anything. The message reminded us of the 1995 World Cup and inspired hope to children. For those who view the movie 'Invictus' will know the dramatic win by Springboks against All Blacks contributed national unity of across the culture lines with the leadership of Nelson Mandela. My wife and I were also at the Ellis Park stadium in 1995 and saw the moment Springboks won, overwhelming the entire stadium with roaring cheers.

In Yokohama, the Springboks dedicated the victory to Chester Williams, the only black player in 1995 Springboks champion team who suddenly passed away right before 2019 World Cup. We were close friends and his sudden departure shocked the whole team. But Springboks members believed that Chester was with us in Yokohama.

One year later after the Rugby World Cup victory, the world had so drastically changed since. The future we had all taken for granted has suddenly transformed into something very different. The COVID-19 pandemic became a crisis of lifetime. Nevertheless, the message of Siya Kolisi was not forgotten even at the time of disaster. With one's own pain and anxiety, people better understood the pain of others. There have been active community efforts of soup kitchens for vulnerable people on the streets. We saw great extent of goodwill. The Japanese community and companies joined the effort and offered their support to the food insecurity.

3 Japan's old connection with South Africa

During my term in Cape Town, I was also fortunate to be part of the Centenary Celebration of Japanese Consulate in Cape Town. The Consulate was established on 8th August in 1918 as the first Japanese overseas mission in Africa.

I had a breath-taking experience of encountering Japanese footprints in the Mother City. 6 iconic Camphor trees at Vergelegen Wine Estate were brought by Willem Adriaan van der Stel from Dejima island around 1700, a house called "Yokohama" at Muizenberg was constructed in 1906 out of paper mache – manual of which was imported from Japan- stands firm against Cape storms over a century, to mention but a few. We can find a stone lantern next to the Parliament, donated by Japanese Government in 1933 to City of Cape Town for the hospitality shown to Japanese immigrant on the way to Brazil.

Looking further back, the first recorded Japanese in South Africa was brought by Zacharias Wagenaer, the second VOC (Dutch East India Company) commander in the Cape in 1662 (10 year after first European settlement) and was freed in 1666 as a free burgher. "Anthony van Japan"

was allowed to own a piece of land at the block called “Cradle of Commerce” where commercial activity started in Cape Town. It is just unimaginable that someone from Japan was part of this heritage.

This is precisely why I say, Cape Town is a scramble juncture or “historical Shibuya Crossing” where people meet and pass by. Nameless people from Japan also came to the southern tip of African continent with unknown ventures at different stages of history. They must have experienced hardships but perhaps they also loved the beauty of the land and the people, and became the part of evolution of Africa.

After I shared this over the radio, I met descendants of Japanese in Cape Town. We share ancestors. This might be why we find so many friends of Japan here and why Japanese residents embrace strong affection to the land and people of the Cape, which must have nurtured over time. We feel we are part of inclusive story of Africa, in the past, at present and to the future.

Here I see some resonance with Western Australia. Japanese pearl divers immigrated to Broome since 1890s have faced with challenges, but became a bridge between the two nations. Their love for the land and people of Australia became a solemn inspiration to us. Many of Japanese residents in Western Australia thereafter followed and contributed in forging friendship and trust with Australians through people-to-people bonds over the years. We acknowledge our difficult past while reflecting our achievement of friendship, the most important asset that should never be taken for granted.

4 Pandemic; reminder to the co-existence with nature

It was also in 1918 after WW I when the world was hit by Spanish Flu. South Africa was one of five countries severely affected by the influenza and succumbed the lives of 300,000.

During the Centenary Celebration, we were honoured that Abdullah Ibrahim, the world Jazz icon offered us the Centenary Concert on the Heritage Day of 2018. Abdullah who stunned me with his deep insights on Japan and Africa, even with the gravesite of Anthony van Japan, says he finds timeless knowledge in Japanese spirituality through his experience in martial arts and finds resonance with wisdoms of African ancestors, especially on awe and respect to the nature with sense of gratitude.

This wisdom had a renewed relevance. Abdullah says, what we are facing with is once-in-a-century time reminder for harmonious co-existence of human lives with the nature and we

should re-evaluate our role. We are proud that the Government of Japan has made an announcement on the conferment of the Order of Rising Sun to Abdullah Ibrahim.

5 Political transitions in South Africa

When I first arrived in Japanese Consulate-General in Pretoria, it was under Apartheid. It was a totally different dispensation under systematic oppression against non-Europeans including Japanese. Then National Party government did not allow defiance or protest against government initiatives. Activists were either banned, detained without trial, or charged for treason. At a time, South Africa had highest number of death penalty in the world.

At the time of my arrival to Consulate General of Japan in Pretoria in 1987, role of young political officer like me was to show presence to anti-Apartheid meetings so that then-government cannot ban the meetings easily, with the diplomatic presence. I tried to be as active as possible but one country that was more active was Australia. Andrew Goledzinowski was a young Australian diplomat everywhere at the scenes. He later became a high profile diplomat in Australia.

I became the first Japanese who met Nelson Mandela soon after he was released from the jail in February 1990, after 27 years of life in prison. He also came to our function; his first appearance to diplomatic function was that of Japan. He had special thoughts on Japan including recovery from Atomic Bomb devastation. One day, his grandson Ndaba Mandela knocked our door and worked at Japanese Embassy as a political assistant. He said he was instructed by his grand father, Nelson Mandela to study about Japan.

I attended CODESA (the Convention for a Democratic South Africa), the negotiation to end Apartheid, almost every day along with other international observers. It was history in making and was full of drama. There were a number of deadlocks but also remarkable breakthroughs. In 1991, we received late Sadako Ogata, then UN High Commissioner for Refugees to CODESA. People called her “five-foot giant” for her courage and passion to protect refugees and she was world known champion of Human Security. Sadako Ogata met Nelson Mandela at CODESA for the first time and the two resonated in their beliefs regarding humanity. Dr Ogata as the JICA President later told me that she was very impressed with Madiba who said to her, “the effort of inclusive development must continue so that level of humanity as the nation be uplifted. When you act for others, you will become a true human being”. Dr Ogata instructed young development officers to be human beings thoroughly and sincerely at all time.

6 Advancement of bilateral relations with South Africa

During my time, the Consulate-General in Pretoria has upgraded to the Embassy of Japan and developed to the biggest Japanese Embassy in Sub-Saharan Africa. A total of 64 joint projects were implemented since the Science and Technology Agreement was signed in 2003. Investment from Japanese companies to South Africa from 2013 to 2019 exceeded \$50bn and investment plans by major Japanese companies are firmly on track despite the disruption by COVID-19.

20 years ago, I was interviewed by a student from Cape Town for her thesis on TICAD. When I came back in 2008, I found Scarlett Cornelissen became a professor at Stellenbosch University, a rising academic star. Today, Professor Cornelissen is one of the most well-known South African professors in Japan. She became the director of the Japan Centre in South Africa, soon after my departure in 2020.

Likewise, out of more than 1600 JICA trainees and 600 JET English teachers to Japan, I always feel blessed when I know someone I interacted with made major success. Some became CEOs of major companies, Major General of Defense force or manager at Japanese companies.

7 Rescue team from South Africa

South Africa is fortunate to have dedicated firefighters. We will never forget the 45 members of the Rescue Team from South Africa who risked their lives and provided search and rescue operations with the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011. It was the first emergency rescue team ever dispatched from Africa to Japan.

In appreciation to their dedication, Japanese police chief said South Africans were prepared to go anywhere in severe conditions of minus 8 degrees Celsius under disciplined guidance of the team leader. As the local police team was also severely affected by the tsunami, having lost their colleagues and were totally worn out physically and mentally, the dedicated rescue operation of South Africans fired up the morale of Japanese police.

Under those circumstances, they had to run away whenever they heard the siren of a small tremor; a member, Dr Pankil Patel, a young South African medical doctor, on request by a young Japanese lady, retrieved a set of Kimono from a near-collapsing apartment and handed it over to the owner. As she was humbled with her gratitude, the Kimono must have been an important piece of heritage for her family. Even if one cannot save lives, one can give hope. And hope becomes power to continue living. The Rescue Team from South Africa has become the symbol of friendship and solidarity between Japan and South Africa.

Australia is another grate nation, proud of volunteerism. 75 members of Australian rescue team came to Japan to help, with C17 aircraft transporting humanitarian goods for 23 times, and Ms Julia Gillard, then Prime Minister of Australia was the very first leader of the world visited the devastated Minami Sanriku and encouraged children at despair. I wish to pay my deep respect to Kangaeru Paw group, Niji no kai, Weekend Japanese School and others in Perth who tirelessly reached out to Australian friends and facilitated assistance to those afflicted in Tohoku.

8 My family and Africa

I met my wife Harumi a teacher at the Japanese School in Johannesburg and married her in 1994. Our three children have South African inspired names. My son Yuwa meaning “together in harmony”, second son Misaki meaning, “Southern Cape”. And my daughter Akari meaning a “flame”(or a light) after the famous phrase of the Long Walk to Freedom; “Man’s goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never be extinguished.”

We were also in Kenya for 2 years from 2006-2007 where we had an unforgettable experience. What happened in Sudan recently was unfolding after Presidential election where some 1500 people died. As violence were approaching from the west to Nairobi, School trips and all events were canceled and everyone knew possibility of closure of the Japanese School and evacuation was approaching near. Then, my wife and I decided to invite all the students, teachers and parents to my residence for camping in order to uplift their spirits. We had a camp fire and prayed for peace. Without saying so, we all knew, should we evacuate, we would go back to Japan as refugees and children may never see each other again as the Japanese School may never open again, once closed. Fortunately, violence calmed down for next 2 weeks and we did not have to leave. Later, the children wrote their essays saying, “I realized the value of Peace, that everyone should make utmost effort to defend, which is taken for granted in Japan”. This vivid memory and experience in Africa was a precious inspiration we still talk among our family members.

For me, Africa has been my learning ground on humanity. “Ningen” (human being) in Japanese means ‘human relations’, not a single isolated being. Human beings are supposed to support each other. The COVID pandemic kept us apart and posed a challenge to very nature of human beings, but it remains what it is. “I am because you are”(Ubuntu meaning humanity in Zulu). Africa today faces some challenges. But it is also true that even under difficult situations, humanity shines. And I humble myself. Africans have incredible goodwill and dedication to care others across the culture lines. This may become invisible and forgotten at times, but at truly critical moments, their dedication and wisdom make it happen.

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