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TICAD: FOR OVERCOMING A SENSE OF DISTANCE BETWEEN JAPAN AND AFRICA

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On May 28, heads of state from more than 40 African countries will gather in Yokohama, Japan, to attend the fourth summit meeting of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV). Japan has been hosting the TICAD summit meetings once every five years since 1993.

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TICAD has three features. First, it is a continuous process of various cooperative efforts and discussions, which take place during the five-year interval between the summit meetings. Second, TICAD has made African ownership of development and growth one of its guiding principles. Third, TICAD has introduced the concept of South-South cooperation by involving as partners developing countries in Southeast Asia and North Africa. The original purpose of the partnerships is to pass advanced developing countries' experiences on to Africa.

TICAD IV in Yokohama has a particular significance in relations to the developed countries. To be held forty days before the G8 Summit meeting in Toyako, Japan, TICAD IV is expected to lead G8 debates on Africa, including the severe negative impact of climate change on development. It needs to be noted in this context that Japan initiated what is now known as the G8 Summit's "outreach" toward the South, including Africa. The last time it hosted the G8 summit in 2000, Japan invited leaders from the South to a dinner with G8 leaders hosted by Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (although the US and Russia were absent) and, earlier, their foreign ministers to a breakfast with G8 foreign ministers hosted by Foreign Minister Yohei Kono. The initiative, taken in response to the wishes expressed at the first-ever South Summit held in Havana in April that year, opened the door of the G8 Summit to the developing world.

TICAD IV is also significant for the attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. To be held at the halfway point of the fifteen-year period the international community has given itself in attaining these goals by 2015, TICAD IV will surely help boost international efforts to meet the MDGs, whose main focus is Africa.

As I recall, Japan's leadership in "mainstreaming" human security in the course of UN debates on MDGs helped expand Member States' perspectives on the agenda for international cooperation in the early part of the 21st century. Indeed, Africa is the region requiring the utmost consideration for human security.

Building upon these efforts, Japan should seize the opportunity of hosting

TICAD IV to further strengthen its commitment to the development of Africa. Japan has already fulfilled its commitment, announced by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at the 2005 Gleneagles Summit, of doubling official development assistance (ODA) to Africa in the three years up to 2007. Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda must commit further expansion of Japanese aid to Africa. It is desirable, in my view, that the Japanese government try to triple its ODA to Africa in the five years (2008-12) leading up to the next summit meeting, TICAD V, which will be presumably held in 2013. Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura's pledge to reverse the downward trend of Japanese ODA, expressed at the G8 Development Ministers' Meeting held in Tokyo earlier this month, is an encouraging first step to this end.

Assistance to Africa should be aimed at two goals: to sustain the development of African economies, which have grown at an annual rate of more than five percent in recent years; and to provide assistance in enhancing human security, attaining the MDGs in particular.

For sustainable growth, it is important for the Japanese government to provide yen loans to develop basic public goods necessary for nation building; such as roads, ports, airports, railways, electric power plants, broadcasting and telecommunication services and water resources recycling technology. As a longer-term goal, I personally favor the idea of constructing superhighways crisscrossing the African continent. The idea would not be far-fetched if planning would be based upon upgrading and linking existing major national highways.

Infrastructure building is essential for increased foreign direct investment (FDI) and trade. For example, provision of Japanese ODA for infrastructure building would help arouse interest in African development within the Japanese private sector. Development of human resources through technical cooperation is equally important for sustainable development. In Asia, infrastructure building through yen loans, the infusion of private capital and human resources development through Japan's technical cooperation together helped advance economic development.

Conceptually, applying the same approach to Africa would be in line with TICAD's basic concept of passing Asia's experiences on to Africa. Needless to say, however, vast differences in political and economic conditions between Africa and Asia, let alone within Africa itself, would demand carefully considered efforts in adaptation when applying Asian models to Africa. In addition, Asian development is not the only model for Africa. Hence the importance of African countries' ownership of their development.

Advancement of human security in Africa is yet another imperative in terms of achieving the MDGs. The broad range of agenda items before us includes securing safe drinking water, improving health care and medical services (including measures against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria), building schools and establishing education systems, preparing disaster prevention measures and improving living conditions in urban slums.

These are in fact areas on which Japan has been focusing its ODA policy. The Japanese government has in recent years been running a special program designed to provide grants for human security purposes. Most notably, Japan disbursed a total of US$5.7 billion over a five-year period from 2000 to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and has pledged to spend US$5 billion in the subsequent five years (2005-9) for the purpose of improving health and medical conditions in developing countries.

On any issue of global concern from conflicts to displacement of people, from extreme poverty to pandemics, from malnutrition to illiteracy and from climate change to food shortage, Africans suffer most. Yet, to the Japanese, Africa is distant both geographically and historically, the Japanese government's efforts to date notwithstanding. The biggest challenge in strengthening Japan's assistance to Africa is therefore how to overcome this sense of distance.

It is the responsibility of elected officials to take a leadership role in overcoming the sense of distance held by the Japanese. It is encouraging in this context that a total of some 70 Japanese lawmakers have visited Africa's 53

countries during the past three years.

This experience has led to political debates, which are now taking place in Tokyo with increased interest and concern. Preparations for TICAD IV have no doubt added to a sense of urgency behind such debates. Hopefully, the Yokohama meeting will make itself an event, which will bring Africa closer to Japan.

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