

Speech by Mr. Hiroshi Oka
Minister of the Embassy of Japan in the United Kingdom
At Sierra Leone Consultative Group Meeting in London
19 November 2009

Hon. President of the Republic of Sierra Leone Dr. Koroma,
Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Mrs. Bangura,
Representatives of the Government of Sierra Leone and Donor countries,
Mr. von der Schulenburg, Executive Representative of Secretary General in
UNIPSIL,
Invited Guests,
Friends of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to be here today on behalf of the Government of Japan in the CG meeting. The Japanese delegation is participating in this conference in order to show our firm commitment to continue to support the development of Sierra Leone.

Now, let me start with a simple question some of you might have in mind: Why Japan for Sierra Leone? What makes Japan, a country thousands of miles away from West Africa, so keen on maintaining peace and enhancing development in Sierra Leone? The answer is that the Japanese people regard the development of Africa as a vitally important goal to achieve. When Japan hosted TICAD IV (the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development) in May 2008, we promised that we would strengthen our support to African growth by doubling our official development assistance, based on the Yokohama Action Plan. This remains unchanged even in the wake of the worldwide economic downturn. Moreover, the new Government, led by the Democratic Party of Japan following general elections this year, has already made it clear that we would keep our commitment in TICAD.

I would like to humbly state that Japan has been one of the most dedicated partners of Sierra Leone, especially after the country was devastated by the unfortunate civil war in 1990s. Ever since the first bilateral consultative meeting took place in May 2005, Japan has constantly conducted series of grant aids and technical cooperation in Freetown and in Kambia District. For instance, introduction of generators to Kingtom Power station, rehabilitation of power lines in Western Area, projects on agriculture and hygiene in Kambia are examples of our projects to meet the basic need of the people who lived under the poverty line. I would like to stress that Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) finds great importance in capacity building of local governments through technical cooperation when conducting such projects in a grassroots level.

While Sierra Leone is taking steps forward for further development in the wake of the war, areas of cooperation are becoming broader than ever before from Japan's point of view. Particularly, energy and education are the two areas of our attention. As for energy, Japan launched Non-Project Grant Aid in July 2009 by contributing six hundred million Japanese Yen (¥600,000,000), approximately 6.3 million US Dollars. The purpose of the project is to enable the Government of Sierra Leone to purchase petroleum-related products and gain money in their counterpart fund. In terms of education, JICA is preparing a comprehensive plan to help Ministry of Education build capacity for creating high-level mathematics and science teachers.

Some of you may recall that Japan started from ashes after the Second World War. After everything was devastated in the war, Japan succeeded in revitalizing its economy by promoting our own heavy and light industries, and raising educational standards of its ordinary people. Thus, we learnt lessons from our own history that both projects play an important role in post-conflict country such as Sierra Leone.

With regard to the Aid Policy discussed in the CG meeting, the Japanese delegation takes note that harmonization and prioritization are two areas of great significance in the aid policy. Likewise, Japan agrees that mutual accountability of the government of Sierra Leone and developing partner in accordance with the Paris Declaration in 2005 can not be more emphasized. Nevertheless, regarding the effectiveness of technical cooperation, we would like to stress that our “technical cooperation” in Sierra Leone aims at helping rural communities build their capacities, and that this should be distinguished from “technical assistance” by consultants to provide burdens to local communities. Therefore, it is vitally important for donors to comprehend the nature of feasible aid modalities, including the effectiveness of technical cooperation by Japan, so that we can secure the sufficient amount clarified in PRSP II.

Before I conclude my speech, last but not the least I should point out is that Japan would like to show gratitude to the UN Family in Sierra Leone. Particularly, UNIPSIL takes vitally important role in maintaining fragile peace and security in Sierra Leone, and we sincerely expect that UNIPSIL will continue to show its presence when the country will face presidential and general elections in 2012. Japan is also grateful for the enduring efforts conducted by UNDP, WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF for the sake of consolidation of peace and rural development. To show our commitment not only in bilateral aid but also in multilateral aid, I am happy to announce today that Japan pledges a new grant aid of 122 million Yen (approximately 1.4 million US dollars) through UNICEF.

I would like to finish my speech by expressing my sincere wish that result of the discussions held in the CG meeting will benefit Sierra Leone for its stability and further development in the future. Thank you very much.