

Remarks made by Ambassador ESTIFANOS Afeworki of the State of Eritrea to Japan on the Occasion of the Reception held to Honor Ambassador ZEMEDE Tekle Commissioner of the State of Eritrea's Visit to Japan - Tokyo Sheraton Miyako Hotel February 23, 2017:

- Honorable Asahiko MIHARA Acting President of Japan – AU Parliamentary Friendship Association
- H.E. Mr. Takeshi OSUGA Director General for African Affairs Department of Foreign Affairs of Japan
- Mr. Yasuo MYAZAWA SEISA Group Founder and CEO
- Honorable Members of Parliament, Mayors, Excellencies and Dear Colleagues
- Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all let me express my deep felt gratitude and appreciation for accepting our invitation to participate, in spite of your busy schedules, in this reception which is being held to honor Ambassador ZEMEDE Tekle - Sports and Culture Commissioner of the State of Eritrea's working visit to Japan from February 19 to 26, 2017.

The current visit to Japan by Ambassador ZEMEDE Tekle is in line with the continued mutual efforts being conducted to enhance and develop the friendly relations, in general, and build sport collaborations prior to Tokyo2020 in particular, between Eritrea and Japan.

As we all know, sport members and their supporters have a very special relationship – a unique process in many ways because it requires the right assemblage of different elements to make them achieve good results. If teamwork is not nurtured effectively among all members, a successful result becomes a rarity - be it at national or local level.

Eritrea, a young nation in Africa, which has come of age - after a long political and armed struggle for independence, is currently facing many challenges. Navigating Eritrea to a strong and economical prosperous destination is not only an odyssey but also a continued process of more than 130 years of nation building. The people of Eritrea continue to work hard, in spite of all the odds, to achieve this goal - in the area of sports and culture as well.

The mutual sharing of important life skills of artists, athletes, players and coaches with the international community in general and Japan in particular, though old, but is new in many ways to the newly independent country of Eritrea.

The long journey of Eritrea to independence and its past participation in Tokyo1964 and the coming Tokyo2020 Olympics and Paralympics is a memorable phenomenon for our generation and somehow intertwined with the importance of Ambassador ZEMEDE's working visit to Japan this week too.

Yemane Negassi, President of the Cycling Federation of Eritrea (central region) and Rigat Tecle Head of the Women Cycling Federation of Eritrea (central region) participated at Cogway Shikoku Discovery Ride 2013 (720 Kms Tour) invited by Japan Eritrea Cycling Friendship from 6th - 16th of October 2013. Yemane was a Tokyo Olympiad of 1964 where a team of 4 Eritrean cyclists and 6 Ethiopian athletes, including Abebe Bekila, the famous marathon champion, participated in one team together. Yemane promised - in a press interview he made after his successful Cogway Shikoku Discovery Ride - "Eritrea shall come to Tokyo once again in 2020 to win - but this time Eritrea will participate under its own flag with many young athletes born after independence."

On September 17, 2014, in the same spirit of friendship and mission, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Eritrea – Japan Sports Collaboration (2014 – 2020) was signed in Asmara.

On September 2, 2015, Agreement on Pre-games Training Camp for Tokyo2020 was also signed between Eritrean National Olympics Committee (ENOC), Kanagawa Prefecture, Odawara City, Hakone Town and Oiso Town.

These were followed by study tours to learn the background and sports experiences of both countries - conducted, sponsored and organized jointly by SEISA Group and Commission of Sports and Culture of Eritrea, in close coordination with the Embassy of the State of Eritrea to Japan for last two years.

Japan Association of Athletics Federation (JAAF) has already started athletes and coach training programs with the cooperation of the Eritrean Association of Athletics Federation (EAAF) starting 2015.

Ministry of Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics 2020, Cabinet Secretariat – HQS for Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, Eritrean Sports and Culture Commission, Government of Eritrea and Government of Japan are all lined up, as a strong team of friendship to support this program in preparation towards a successful Tokyo2020. The friendship, which is mutually being built through different venues of private and public participation, will definitely last beyond the horizon of Tokyo2020.

Currently, Japan Olympic Committee (JOC) and Eritrean National Olympic Committee are ready to sign a technical cooperation program to further boost and enhance this growing friendship.

Therefore, let me take this opportunity to express our deep felt gratitude and thanks to all the friends of this project of sports and cultural exchange between Eritrea and Japan present here today. And as I mentioned in my introduction, let's work hand-in-hand, together, in a spirit of a very strong, closely knitted team, to further promote Eritrea - Japan long lasting friendship and the success of Tokyo2020.

Sport and culture is where the heartbeat of the people of Eritrea and Japan is. Thank you, once again, for all the solidarity and friendship that you all extended to the successful working visit of Commissioner ZEMEDE to Japan.

Arigato