

Excellency Dr. Giorgis Tesfamichael, Minister of National Development;

Excellency Mr. Toshihisa Takata, Ambassador of Japan to the State of Eritrea;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me first express the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' appreciation to the Japanese delegation led by H.E. Toshihisa Takata for coming to discuss with the Eritrean counterpart issues of economic cooperation between our two countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' appreciation also goes to the Ministry of National Development in general and to H.E. Minister Ghiorgis for arranging this meeting.

I would like also to thank the Government of Japan for their continuous support to the development endeavors of Africa in general and to the state of Eritrea in particular, despite the extensive destruction caused by the March Tsunami and Earthquake. Again I would like to convey our sincere sympathy and condolences to the Government of Japan and to the bereaved families.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is happy to see the convening of this Economic Cooperation Policy Consultation. I feel also honoured to take part in this meeting representing the Ministry. Furthermore, I am pleased to highlight very briefly the Government of Eritrea's policy in the areas of International economic cooperation.

Eritrea is a small, poor and young nation which emerged from the ashes of a very long struggle for freedom and a bitter war waged to defend its sovereignty from Ethiopian aggression of 1998-2000.

Eritrea is one of the 48 LDC's of the world. To make matters worse, this country is often hit by cyclical droughts. It is located in a very strategic part of Africa and in a volatile, hostile regional environment. But it enjoys internal peace and harmony.

It goes without saying that, for these and many other reasons, Eritrea welcomes International economic cooperation and it wants Japan to be one of its most important partners in development.

Despite threats and challenges, the people and the government of Eritrea are focused on development. Eritrea aspires to become a self-reliant prosperous country. The Government of Eritrea's priority of priorities is the improvement of the standard of living of its people.

The Government and the people of Eritrea have always been committed to their objectives through hard work and mainly through self reliance which by no means is tantamount to self-isolation or rejection of support and genuine partnership.

The results of their efforts in many areas are impressive and particularly in food security, health, education and infrastructure are remarkable, especially if one takes into account that they have been achieved in a very adverse regional and international environment.

According to our policy, international economic cooperation should be>

- > Based on partnership and not in donor-recipient relationship;
- > Respectful of mutual values, dignity and sovereignty;
- > Geared more towards trade and investment, which are the cornerstone of its development strategy, rather than ODA or aid;
- > That there must not be strings or preconditions attached to it that jeopardize political independence;
- > Foreign Policy of Eritrea encourages economic cooperation to be handled bilaterally than through multilateral organizations. This is because direct economic cooperation between two friendly nations shortens bureaucracy and enhances transparency.
- > Our policy also encourages broad based and integrated economic cooperation made with the countries of our region.

Finally, I would like to draw to your attention that the Government of Eritrea and its Foreign Policy attaches strong importance to Foreign Direct Investment, Trade, and partnership not aid. And in line with this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expects this policy consultation to include issues of future investment and trade opportunities between Eritrea and Japan.

Thank you!