

AFRICAN DIPLOMATIC CORPS (ADC)

*Statement by H.E. Mr. Jean-Christian OBAME
Ambassador of Gabon
Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps
On the Occasion of the 2009 Africa Day Symposium
UNU, May 25, 2009*

**Honorable Yoshimori, Former Prime Minister of Japan,
Professor Konrad Osterwalder, Rector of United Nations University,
Excellency Mr. Nobihide Minorikawa, Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign
Affairs,
Honorable Mrs. Elisabeth TANKEU, Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the
African Union,
Excellencies and Dear Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. May 25, is an important date for all African and friends of Africa as we celebrate, together, the AFRICA DAY, which is the historical Day of the creation of the Organization of African Unity, 46 years ago, back to May 1963. Therefore, this symposium, which is part of this celebration, gives us an opportunity to contribute intellectually to paving the challenging roads towards a unified, peaceful and prosperous Africa. It is in this context that on behalf of the African Diplomatic Corps (ADC) in Japan, I would like to begin by extending our appreciation to the management of the UNU for once again having accepted to co-organize with the ADC this Symposium. Our sincere gratitude goes also to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the constant support provided to us in connection with this symposium.
2. Regarding the participants, first of all, I would like to express our sincere thanks to the Honorable Yoshiro Mori, Former Prime Minister of Japan and Chairman of the AU- Japan Parliamentary Friendship League for having accepted to be the Keynote Speaker of our 2009 Africa Day Symposium. In the same vein, let me convey our deepest appreciation to H.E Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the AU Commission for honoring us with his presence

at this symposium through the Honorable **Mrs. Elisabeth Tankeu**, Commissioner for Trade and Industry at the AU. Finally, let me also thank all the participants and the public for being here today with us.

Ladies and Gentleman Honorable Guests,

3. The theme for this year's symposium is "**The Global Financial Crisis and its impact on Africa: The Role of Japan and TICAD**". The choice for this theme could not have been more appropriate and timely since the impact of the global economic and financial crisis on African economies is becoming more and more profound and in many instances worrisome. Thus, recent forecasts and indicators are all pointing out that the overall economic growth in Africa will be reduced by half to less than 3 % in 2009. And consequently, for the first time since 1994, the per capita income growth will be negative for the continent as a whole. Moreover, due to the falling commodity prices (mineral and non-mineral alike) resulting from the plummeting demand from developed countries, combined with the decline in worker remittances, tourism receipts and investment flows, African countries' external accounts and budget deficits are expected to substantially widen.
4. With the likely pursue of the crisis, this process could well reverse the progress made over the recent years in stabilizing the macro-economic situation in most of our countries. Also, it would make it even more difficult for African countries to try to achieve the Millennium Goals, which were already elusive for a number of them. All in all, it is estimated that Africa could loose up to 50 billion US dollars over the next two years.
5. It is against this backdrop that the present symposium is being held today. Clearly, the challenges for the keynote speakers and panellists will be twofold: to assess the factors behind the current global economic and financial crisis affecting Africa and to highlight not only the short term crisis responses, but more importantly, the medium and longer term structural issues facing Africa, which are at the core of the TICAD IV Action plan in

its synergy with the NEPAD and other development programs across the African continent.

6. On Japan side, this symposium would likely be another good platform for Japanese representatives at the political level and from MOFA and JICA to remind us about the successful TICAD IV Follow-up Ministerial Meeting held in Botswana last march, just ahead of the G-20 Summit held in London in April and to confirm the very important commitments made by Japan including among others:

- The announcement by the Japanese government that, despite the global financial crisis, it will maintain its pledge to double its development aid to Africa;

-The agreement by the Government of Japan to accelerate the implementation of some specific measures relating to technical assistance or grant and soft loans in favor of African countries; and

- Further commitment made by Japan for more trade and investment missions to Africa.

7. On the African side, this symposium is an occasion to reaffirm the collective determination of African governments and their regional institutions, such as the African Union and the African Development Bank, to preserve the gains obtained in the recent past through the implementation of painful macroeconomic reforms. In this regard, we have no doubt that **Mrs TANKEU** from the African Union, will share with us the strategies being contemplated or implemented at individual and sub-regional levels in Africa and aimed at boosting growth, through grater domestic investment in soft and hard infrastructure, agriculture, industry, tourism and other sectors where African economies have a comparative advantage.

8. She will also surely emphasize policy actions by African Governments, despite recent setbacks in some areas, to improve governance, consolidate peace and the democratic

process while mitigating conflicts at the continental level, through the leadership of the African Union. One could then expect that in so doing, Africa, with its enormous economic potential, and with a stimulus package, technical and financial, timely received from outside partners, could well manage the current economic crisis and alleviate likely social and political tensions at continental level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. To conclude, like many observers, let me reiterate that the main challenge ahead of Africa today is how to strike a balance between the short-term crisis response measures, while maintaining the focus on the medium and longer term issues, which are essential for the sustainable economic and social development of our continent. Japan, within the context the TICAD process launched sixteen years ago, can indeed strengthen further its partnership with Africa and contribute in confronting this challenge. In this regard, this Symposium provides a platform for debating issues that could strengthen such a partnership for the mutual interests of Japan and Africa and their respective peoples.

Thank you for listening