

PRESIDENT UHURU KENYATTA'S INTERVIEW IN TOKYO, JAPAN.

Q. Mr. President, what are the main purposes of your visit to Japan at this time?

I think, three-fold. One, to attend the 3rd UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai not just to participate at the conference; but to see how we can work with other countries around the world to mitigate some of the disasters that are caused especially as a result of climate change.

You know in Kenya we are constantly either having droughts or floods. And I think that there is a great understanding now that we must be better prepared going to the future on what mechanisms can be put in place to better handle some of these issues when they happen. So that was one area. And we got a lot of commitments made especially by the Government of Japan to help support us and other countries. You know, Japan has got good mitigation measures in place. They are a country that suffered greatly from natural disasters. And they have very good mechanisms in place. So this is an area where we are trying to learn as we set up our own mechanisms at home. We want to see how we can cooperate and partner with Japan towards that end.

We have also had fruitful discussions with Japan in matters pertaining to our bilateral engagement. They have pledged – as you may be aware – some \$38 million to help us set up a universal healthcare facility. And this is something that we are very keen on. You have heard me on several occasions telling people that that is the way we ultimately want to follow. That is why we are recruiting as many people as we can to join the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF). And Japan has pledged to support us in that particular program.

We also discussed issues of how we can work together with them to exploit our “blue” economy. As I was saying a couple of weeks ago, Kenyan territory in the sea is equivalent to almost three quarters of Kenya’s economy on the land. And this is an area where Japan has been very successful. It is an area where my Government is very keen to upscale our investment and exploration into – the economic opportunity that exists in the sea including fishing, deep sea exploration, and so forth. Again, this is another area where we centred a lot of our discussions on.

You know also that Japan has been supporting us in our energy program. We have commitment that they will work together with us to upscale the Olkaria project by another 70-megawatt. We are also working with them to develop a further 280-megawatt on a Public Private Partnership basis. We are also working with them to develop berth number 20, currently ongoing at the Mombasa Port. But we are also working to see how we can fast-track berth number 21 and 22 because ultimately we want to ensure that we develop Mombasa in the shortest possible time to be the premiere seaport of the East and Central African region. And this is another area where we had detailed discussions with Japan going forward.

So these – amongst many other areas as well as discussions with their business forum about the investment potentials in Kenya in the agricultural sector, manufacturing sector, oil and gas and pipeline – took centre stage in our visit to Japan.

We had a good number of discussions also with JICA and other private sector players in Japan to see how we can partner together in those areas.

Q. Many Japanese companies desire to invest in Kenya and expand their business. However, they are also concerned about security risks, especially the threat of Al-Shabaab. How do you intend to deal with that threat, Mr. President?

This is what we are trying to explain. Indeed we have a threat of Al-Shabaab and we are not denying that we have that threat. This a threat occasioned by the fact of the neighbourhood that we live in. We are explaining what we are trying to do. We are up scaling in terms of the security measures that we are putting in place. And the Japanese investors appreciate and also understand this.

But we have said that the true way to win this fight is for the international community to actual come together because Kenya is not the only country that is under threat. You have Nigeria, you have Libya, you have Syria, you have attacks in France. So we just have to all collaborate and to partner together to root out this evil from our midst. We have told them what we are doing. They have equally pledged to support and to work with us in fighting this menace as we move forward. So we must all come together –and this is the message I keep on telling Kenyans – we must all come together to see how we can truly eliminate this. The Government will continue to continuously do its part. We are foiling attempted attacks every other day. Some of them – you know – they manage to succeed like they did in Mandera. But we are doing everything that we can to ensure that our country and our citizens are protected from this threat. We are increasing our investment in this area, increasing surveillance, increasing intelligence gathering to help us forestall future attacks. And, this is an area that I think Japan also appreciate that it is not a Kenyan phenomenon. It is a worldwide phenomenon that is hitting people across the globe. And we just need to really pool and focus our resources to be able to deal with this threat ultimately in order to be able to build and to have a secure and safe environment for people to do business and to prosper.

Q. Kenya desires to become a middle-income country by 2030. How do you intend to achieve this target?

I think we are on course and on track because the way to achieve it is by being clear and focused, creating first and foremost the necessary infrastructure framework that you need – ensuring that you have the right business environment; ensuring that you have adequate energy; ensuring that you have trained manpower; but also working to ensure that you incorporate the majority of your population into this particular program.

That is why we are very keen – for example – on this issue of education and providing power to our schools. We know if we provide that power, that power is not just going to the schools; it is also going to the surrounding neighbourhoods. This way, we involve more people in the development agenda.

That is also why we are keen on our roads program. We are expanding our infrastructure so that we simplify the ability of our farmers to bring their produce to the market and improve the call chain so that we are able to preserve and protect our produce much better.

That is why we are keen on the issue of universal health to ensure that people have access to universal health. That is why we are keen on our energy projects to ensure that we are able to give Kenyans reliable and affordable energy.

That is why we are keen on our slum-upgrading program to ensure that Nairobi does not belong to just a few elite but every resident of Nairobi should feel that they are part and parcel of that society. And that society cannot grow unless those who are at the lowest level are also helped to a level where they can make a sustainable livelihood.

So this informs a number of the programs that we have and I believe strongly that so long as we remain focused; so long as we are not distracted by useless politics, I am strongly of the opinion that if we maintain our focus, we can achieve our middle income status not even by 2030 but much sooner than that. And this really, is my focus and the focus of my Government.

That is why we keep on say we must root out this vice of corruption. These are things and problems that drag us back. They deny us resources that should go to productive sectors. And you will see shortly what actions we are going to begin taking against those who engage in this kind of activities. Because it is this kind of things – empty rhetoric, corruption and things like that – that distract us from the focus that we need to have in order for us to be a middle-income country in the shortest possible time.

Q. Mr. President, Kenya, African Union and the Japanese Government continue to talk about holding the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in Africa in 2016. Can you manage to host such a large meeting in Kenya?

Well, I strongly believe so. We have the capacity to do so. We have the ability to do so. We have the facilities to be able to do so. All we need is to get the understanding from the other African countries. You see, if we can get an agreement for them to support Kenya's bid to host this conference, I think it will be fantastic. If we succeed in hosting this conference, it would give us an opportunity to showcase to the Japanese people, to Japanese business, to Japanese industry, to potential Japanese tourists the potential that exists not just in Kenya but also on the African continent.

So for us it is a very important thing and I am really hoping that we will be able to get the necessary support from the African Union and other African countries so that Kenya can host this very first TICAD to be held in the African continent.

Q. What does Kenya intend to do to bridge the trade imbalance which is currently in favour of Japan?

This is another area where we were talking about how we can get direct flights coming into Japan. This will help us improve the number of tourists coming from Japan to Kenya. It will also help the flow of goods such as our flowers, which are becoming very popular here in Japan. It will boost our flower exports, our other horticultural exports, our nuts and other products that we export from Kenya.

But I also believe what we are also trying to do is to encourage additional investment that can allow us to begin manufacturing in Kenya to serve the region and other parts of the world. I think a mixture of this will go a long way towards helping us begin to get some balance in terms of our trade levels, which as you have correctly stated are currently very strongly in favour of Japan.

I believe that some of these initiatives that we are taking are all aimed to see how we can improve the balance of trade to be much better in favour of Kenya than it currently is.

Q. Having attended the 3rd UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, what lessons could Kenya learn from Japan on managing natural calamities?

I think one, is their early warning systems. Two, is the ability to integrate the various departments to be able to have a unified single response. Three, is the level of training that they have. What we found most amazing is that children even at kindergarten level are taught very early and have regular training sessions on what to do when they hear the alarm. They know they first move to higher ground.

All these things – the training, the education, the unified command structures – that they have are some of the lessons that I think Kenya can pick up. We can pick on the early warning systems to help us also equally be better prepared to face some of the recurrent disasters that face us from time to time. Because it was clear at the conference that we are all affected by the issues of climate change that are going on today. We have moved from asking the question 'if it will happen'. That question has been answered 'when it will happen'. So the issue now is 'how prepared are we to face up to it when it does'. Because it is not 'if it will happen'. Therefore, we just need to know how prepared we are to deal with that particular problem.