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NGO Blog List

- JEN BLOG
- Project - NICCO
- WORLD VISION BLOG
- AAR Japan
- Save the children
- Volces from the field
- SHARE Staff Blog
- ASHINAGA - News
- All Hands Volunteers

NGO List

Direct Donation

For reconstruction and living support to communities

- NICCO
- AAR JAPAN
- PWJ/PWA
- JEN
- All Hands Volunteers
- Red Cross

For medical and health support

SHARE

For children

- Ashinaga
- Save the Children
- World Vision
- UNICEF

Indirect Donation

Platform raising funds for locally-active NGOs in Japan

- JCIE
- Give 2 Asia

Ashinaga President Tamai speaks at Makerere University in Uganda.

May 11, 2012 11:50



Ashinaga President Tamai (center) attends a tree planting ceremony at Makerere University

Ashinaga President Yoshiomi Tamai delivered a lecture on May 4 at Makerere University in Uganda. Makerere University was first established as a technical school in 1922, and is now Uganda's largest institution of higher learning. The university today features 22 faculties, institutes, and schools offering programs to some 30,000 undergraduate and 3,000 graduate students. To date, the Makerere Africa Lecture Series has featured four lecturers, and President Tamai was invited not only as the first speaker from Japan, but also the first non-African lecturer. Past lecturers include notable figures such as a former South African president and a former governor of the Bank of Uganda.



President Tamai (right) and Richard Kazynski (left)

On the day of the lecture, people gathered at the main hall of Makere University. The hall was filled with an audience of about 600, thanks to the special posters and banners publicizing the lecture that the university had

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- Ashinaga President Tamai speaks at Makerere University in Uganda.
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- Publication of "Daddy's face," essays by children bereaved by the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011

Pages

- About This NGO
- Original Post

Site Contents

- Our Top Recommendations
- Direct Donation
- Inirect Donation
- NGO Recent Posts
- NGO Blog List
- About the Website

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put up all over campus. Sitting at an oblong table on the stage, and accompanied by Mondo Kagonyera, chancellor of Makerere University, Luboobi Livingstone, former vice chancellor of Makerere University, and James B. Baba, Minister of State Internal Affairs and Former Uganda Ambassador to Japan, President Tamai began his address, titled “Ashinaga’s 100-year Vision for the Education of African Orphans: Work Hard, Aim High,” through interpreter Richard Kazynski, an Ashinaga associate. The lecture was realized after the Makerere University administration learned of President Tamai’s 100-year vision, and requested that he talk about it for the university’s students.

In the first half of his talk, President Tamai explained how the loss of his mother in a traffic accident in 1963, as well as the loss of his then-29-year-old wife to an incurable disease, had been major factors in motivating him to work in support of orphans. He also described how he had cut short a business trip to Uganda and returned to Japan immediately after the earthquake and subsequent tsunami struck the Tohoku region in 2011. He noted that Ashinaga had quickly decided to provide one-time emergency relief grants to children who had lost parents or guardians to the catastrophe, and that the swift action had been highly praised both in Japan and overseas.



Audience in the main hall of Makerere University

In the latter half of his lecture, President Tamai discussed how Ashinaga had devoted its efforts to the psychological and emotional healing of children who had lost parents in other countries, as well as how the organization had promoted international exchange with them, beginning with an Ashinaga program in 2000 that brought to Japan 32 children orphaned by disasters and conflicts in Turkey, Taiwan, Kosovo, and Colombia. The audience applauded when he related how Ritah Nabukenya, a Ugandan woman who had lost her father to HIV/AIDS, had received a scholarship from Ashinaga to come to Japan in 2006 and study at Waseda University, where she is now enrolled in graduate school. President Tamai informed the audience that other orphans from Uganda had received similar scholarships from Ashinaga, and were currently studying at prestigious Japanese universities such as International Christian University, Sophia University, Kansai University, and Doshisha University, and noted that the number of scholarship recipients from Uganda would exceed 30 in 2013.

President Tamai then explained that, in the context of a prediction by the

United Nations that the population of the African continent would account for one third of the world's population in the 22nd century, the education of children is indispensable to improving African living standards and preventing European countries, China, and India from exploiting Africans. He described the "Ashinaga 100-year Vision of Educational Support for Orphans in Africa," which plans to take one superior student from each of the 49 Sub-Saharan nations and prepare them for entry into top universities around the world. President Tamai admitted that it would require significant funds to enable 49 students to study overseas each year, but added with confidence and passion that he believed the plan to be feasible, given his own experience of having collected over 90 billion yen in donations over the past 40 years only in Japan.

In closing, President Tamai encouraged attending students to work hard and hold true to their beliefs, and warned that persons who worked halfheartedly would never achieve much; the audience responded with enthusiastic applause.



Children from Terakoya, a school run by Ashinaga Uganda, an international NGO established in Uganda to support children who have lost parents to HIV/AIDS and who cannot afford to study at school, were also invited to the lecture. Dressed in colorful costumes, and accompanied by an up-tempo drumbeat, the children delivered an enthusiastic 15-minute performance of a folk dance while occasionally uttering strident whoops and cries, after which the hall echoed with thunderous applause and cheers.

His Excellency Kazuo Minagawa, the Japanese ambassador to Uganda, officially announced in his speech after the children's performance that Japanese Prince Akishino and his wife Princess Kiko would visit the Ashinaga Uganda Rainbow House in June, on the occasion of their visit to Uganda to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Uganda.

In his speech at the end of the event, Mondo Kagonyera, Chancellor of Makerere University, said, "I myself was an orphan at the age of 15 and had to endure many hardships in order to somehow raise money for school, so when President Tamai talks about supporting orphans, I am personally touched, and would like to thank him. Japanese people are very disciplined, and I would also like to note their spirit of generosity in reaching out to less fortunate people. That is the reason why Japan is so successful, in my view. In Africa, people want to get rich very quickly,

even if it means stealing. You can't develop that way. The individual may become rich, but the country can't develop through stealing. What this gentleman (President Tamai) is doing is to help some unfortunate kids, and to contribute to the development of this country, by giving them an education, which is the most important thing needed for Africa to develop. I support President Tamai and his 100-year vision, which will make it possible for everyone—including the poor—to live well."

Students filled out a questionnaire after the lecture, and among the many responses praising President Tamai, one read, "I admire Mr. Tamai, who at the age of 77 still displays leadership and struggles to eradicate poverty and support orphans with his feet set firmly on the ground in Africa."

The lecture attracted much local media attention, with coverage by nine news organizations, including News Vision newspaper, NBS TV, and UBC radio.

President Tamai attended an Ashinaga Uganda board of directors meeting on May 5, after which he left Uganda for New York on May 9 to meet with Dr. Catharine Bond Hill, President of Vassar College, Motoatsu Sakurai, President of The Japan Society, and His Excellency Shigeyuki Hiroki, Ambassador and Consul General of Japan in New York. He also planned to meet with officials from the National Basketball Association, representatives of Morgan Stanley, and the restaurant Nobu New York, among others, to appeal for support for the Ashinaga 100-year vision to provide educational support for children in Africa who have lost parents to HIV/AIDS.

Yoshiomi Tamai, Founder and President

Today, the three core goals of the Ashinaga Movement are: (1) to ensure that orphaned children—defined as those who have lost one or both parents or guardians due to natural disasters, non-vehicle accidents, illness, or suicide—can attend high school and institutions of higher learning, such as universities; (2) to provide orphans with psychological support; and (3) to implement the "Ashinaga 100-year Vision," which focuses on providing educational support to orphans around the world.

In order to achieve the third goal, we must first liberate orphans from the chains of poverty. It is critical to reduce poverty in Africa, which contains some of the poorest countries in the world, and educate orphans to act as leaders who can contribute to the future of their communities and nations. I firmly believe that this aim requires us to first break the cycle of poverty, which has long been a major burden on Africa, and that the key to doing this is support for education.

By 2050, according to the United Nations, the population of Africa will reach 2.3 billion, accounting for a quarter of the world's population; by 2100, Africa's population will be 3.6 billion, which means that one third of the world's population will be African. From an economic perspective, this will lead to enormous consumption, and the African continent will be the

most affluent in the world. The dream of the Ashinaga Movement is that this will then allow for coexistence with the former rich and dominant nations, which face increasing challenges related to their aging populations and economic hardship.

To realize this dream, we must work to educate true future leaders, and support countries that can drive and sustain themselves. Human beings can coexist in harmony, regardless of the color of their skin. The key lies in how the world can support Sub-Saharan countries in escaping from poverty. Our strategy comprises the following:

- 1) Selecting outstanding students from each Sub-Saharan country.
- 2) Sending these students to the world's top-ranked universities, providing them with full scholarships and living expenses for four years. It will be sufficient if we continue this program for 30 years.
- 3) International "Ashinaga-san" (donors), including businesses, wealthy individuals, and professional athletes, will help fill any gaps between scholarships provided by the universities themselves and the funding required by the students.

My colleagues and I have driven the Ashinaga Movement for over 40 years, and in the process have helped some 90,000 orphaned students graduate from high school and/or attend university. This was accomplished thanks to donors who are almost exclusively Japanese. I do not believe that it would be difficult for people around the world to provide sufficient funding to support 49—or more—African students with scholarships.

This year, Ms. Nabukenya Ritah Bukenya, the first Ashinaga international student, will attend Vassar College in the United States, the alma mater of Daddy-Long-Legs author Jean Webster, to commemorate the book's 100th anniversary. The world is full of humane, fair-minded people. I believe that the Ashinaga 100-Year Vision of educational support for orphans in Africa will bring about happiness not only for Africans, but for the whole human race. I pray that we all acquire the ability to act out of a spirit of trust in our fellow person.

<< Older Post



[PAGE TOP](#) ↑