

An Open Letter to Mr. Kozo Yamamoto on your remark on Africa and People with African Roots

To: Mr. Kozo Yamamoto
Member of the House of Representatives, Liberal Democratic Party

During the seminar organised by Mr. Asahiko Mihara, LDP Parliamentarian, that was held at Kitakyushu on the 23rd of November, 2017, you reportedly stated, "What I can't follow is his (Mr. Mihara's) passion for Africa," "Why would you like such a black thing?" After that, you commented, "If my remark can cause misunderstanding, I would like to withdraw it." We are extremely disappointed to hear such a statement, and strongly protest against this kind of behavior.

"African Kids Club," which is a part of Africa Japan Forum, is a place of gathering for children who have roots in Africa, where we host various activities. Our parents (either one or both) are from African countries, and we hold pride in that. Mr. Yamamoto, no matter how you interpret it, your remark "Why would you like such a black thing?" is a racist remark, and was spoken with contempt. Even the explanation you used of "the Dark Continent" is based on the context of the distressful history of colonial overruling and exploitation Africa has experienced. And even we, the young generation of Japan, know that.

Your excuse, supposing "if my remark can cause misunderstanding," is a passive statement, showing that you have not truly contemplated your words. Since you are a politician you should understand the weight and power of words. And I believe you need to own up to your mistake. Such a remark being presented by a parliamentarian, and by an ex-minister will cause distrust towards Japan among African nations, and even on a much larger global scale. We believe that treating all people and all cultures with the respect they deserve, and facing each other on the equal terms is the most important thing in today's society.

We seek that you reflect upon your remark, face your racist claims, and sincerely apologize to the children and youth of Japan who have their roots in Africa, and all Africans as well as the people who have courage to resist racism. Please set an example, and show children that people can learn from their mistakes. We hope to either receive an answer, or a chance to talk personally with you as an answer to our feelings expressed in this letter.

African Kids Club of the Africa Japan Forum
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