

Rwanda national day

Can-do commitment drives Rwanda forward

Emile Rwamasirabo
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC
OF RWANDA

The occasion of the Republic of Rwanda's Liberation Day gives me the unique honor and privilege to convey to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial family, the Cabinet and the entire people of Japan the warmest greetings from the people of Rwanda. This July 4, Rwanda celebrates the 47th anniversary of the access to independence as well Liberation Day, the date when genocide against the Tutsi was stopped in 1994 by the Rwanda Patriotic Front.



In Rwanda, Liberation Day carries a lot of meaning. It symbolizes the courage, the responsibility and the wisdom to overcome the worst crime against humanity, and then move on to rebuild a nation based on unity and reconciliation, inclusiveness and consensus-building.

Despite the primacy of these values, Rwandans know that they cannot sustain their nation-rebuilding process un-

less there is concurrent socio-economic development that ensures a dignified life for ordinary citizens. In this regard Liberation Day invites Rwandans to wake up, work harder, overcome poverty, and other challenges such as infant and maternal mortality. In the same line of thought, this has revived and given a very practical meaning to the cultural practice of "imihigo," or public pledge, by leaders at all levels of the state to work for concrete achievements in the course of the year.

All this drives to a change toward a can-do attitude that "unlocks people's minds, allows innovation to take place and enables people to exercise their talents" (Paul Kagame). The design and management of the "Mutuelle de Sante (mutual insurance)," a community-based insurance that finances primary health-care costs and covers over 80 percent of the population, can confidently be attributed to this attitude shift.

Rwanda and Japan have enjoyed very friendly relations ever since the early years of

independence not only through formal diplomatic ties but even more by people-to-people engagement, for example, when Massaya Hattori moved with his family to Rwanda from 1965 to 1971 to create and run the Rwanda National Bank. This bank is a well-established and respected institution that has been able to fully manage Rwandan monetary policy from even soon after the aftermath of the 1994 genocide.

Since then, high-level visits on both sides have strengthened our relations. It was in that context that H.E. Paul Kagame, president of the Republic of Rwanda, joined his African colleagues and the prime minister of Japan at the May 2008 TICAD IV summit in Yokohama.

The opening of the Embassy of Japan in Kigali in January 2010 is a further step to the consolidation of our friendship. Rwanda appreciates the support of the government and people of Japan on its road map to development, especially in the areas of human resources development and ru-



President Paul Kagame of the Republic of Rwanda

ral transformation.

Despite being a landlocked country with limited resources, Rwanda has the ambition of moving from the list of less-developed to middle-income countries by 2020. This vision is based on a bold political will to invest in the people by developing knowledge, the skills and the mind-set change to transform the rural economy that involves over 80 percent of our population. This requires that we wholly embrace science and technology as a tool for development. In this regard, JICA support to technical and vocational training institutions in Rwanda such as the Tumba College of Technology is a sure way to building the required resources.

Rwandans highly appreciate the support from various institutions, companies and individuals in Japan who have joined hands with them in various projects pertaining to technology transfer and value addition to available raw materials. Investment in skills development and promotion of SMEs are indeed part and parcel of the 2020 development agenda, and can be looked at as the basis of sustainable industrialization. It is against this background that for ex-

ample fine Rwanda coffee has been able to penetrate the ever-demanding Japanese market.

Despite the reliance on agriculture, Rwanda is aware of the need to diversify its resources base by investing in other potential opportunities such as mining, light manufacturing and services. The government has taken steps toward systematic geological surveys, thus moving mining exploration from the realm of artisan craftsmanship. Similarly, investment in tourism promotion of the famous mountain gorillas and the hilly landscape has proved to be a sustainable source of revenue. Despite the current global crisis, tourism revenues saw a 55 percent increase between 2007 and 2008. In actual fact, tourism has been the top earner of hard currency for the last two years.

Besides, efforts to attract foreign direct investment are bearing fruit especially in the service industry, thus explaining the steady economic growth that Rwanda has enjoyed in the last 15 years. All these positive developments would not have been possible without the dedicated and focused leadership that Rwanda is blessed with. Relentless efforts are made to establish and maintain a business-friendly environment that en-

ables people and property security, cleanliness and corruption-free culture. Investors are encouraged to locate in Rwanda for future expansion not only in the East African Community (EAC) but also in the Common Market of East and Southern Africa (COMESA).

Located in the middle of the Great Lakes Region, 1,500 km from the nearest ocean port, Rwanda has no choice but to ease access to markets if it is to take advantage of regional and international trade. After joining the EAC in 2007, Rwanda will fully join its Customs Union this year along with its sister countries in East Africa. It is also an active member of COMESA, a 420 million people market. There is need therefore to link the road network corridors, expand to the East Africa rail system and expand air services.

We appreciate the role played by Japan through the TICAD IV process in building consensus among development partners and financial institutions on the strategic role of infrastructure development for poverty reduction and sustainable peace in Africa, and in the Great Lakes Region in particular. We look forward to further steps to bring more flexibility to accessing soft loans, the most realistic mode of infrastructure devel-

opment funding in the current financial system.

More than ever before, Rwanda plays an active role in sustainable peace-building in the region and on the continent as peace remains a requirement for regional development. Active engagement with regional governments and in particular the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo is a condition for stability in the region. We view this engagement not only as a government-to-government venture but also as social and economic cooperation that builds shared interests along the common border, such as the Lake Kivu meth-

ane gas exploitation.

Under the African Union Peace and Security Council, Rwanda is an active member of the East Africa Standby Brigade (EASBRIG). The support of the government of Japan to the Rwanda Peace Academy further strengthens EASBRIG's capacities. In a broader context, Rwanda has been actively involved in peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the U.N. Security Council or the African Union and as such over 3,000 troops are stationed in Darfur, the Republic of Sudan.

While the challenges ahead are enormous, the government and people of Rwanda are very confident that together with friendly nations, and Japan in particular, we are on the right track to building a better world.

Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Rwanda
on the 47th Anniversary
of Their Independence and Liberation Day



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Endangered: Mountain gorillas in the Virunga Volcano Region. Rwanda is home to around one-third of the world's remaining 700 mountain gorillas. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA