

# Djibouti national day

## African gateway consolidates its position

Ahmed Arita Ali  
AMBASSADOR OF DJIBOUTI TO JAPAN

In Djibouti, the month of June is synonymous with festive moments culminating on June 27 with Independence Day. Amid these celebrations, it is with great pleasure that I seize this opportunity to address the readers of The Japan Times and share with them these joyous moments lived by the Djibouti people inside the country and overseas.

On this auspicious occasion, I would like to express on behalf of H.E. Ismail Omar Guelleh, president of the Republic of Djibouti, and the Djibouti people my best wishes for health and happiness for Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko and to the rest of the Imperial Family, and peace



and prosperity to the friendly people and government of Japan.

The relations between Japan and Djibouti have been growing strongly for this past year through a number of high-level exchanges of visits. During 2009, two ministers from transport and health, as well as other high-level officials, including the president of the Chamber of Commerce and director of National Security, came to Japan for fruitful discussions with Japanese authorities. On the Japanese side, two vice ministers went to Djibouti and were able to witness the favorable inclination of the Djibouti authorities for a solid relationship based on friendship and mutual respect. Thanks to this common understanding, the relations have extended and increased in volume and perspective.

They cover a wide spectrum including political, economic, and social and tourist

cooperation. They also share common positions on the maintenance of peace and security and for that reason have cooperated in fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia. Since 2009, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces and the coast guards have been engaged in protecting the commercial vessels passing through these waters, considered one of the most paramount maritime lanes in the world in terms of traffic. The piracy has provoked havoc in the maritime traffic along the Somali coasts and in the Gulf of Aden, and inflicted economic loss not only on the shipping industry but also on the littoral countries by reducing their port revenue and doubling the fees of insurance for the vessels sailing on this lane. In the face of this scourge, the countries of the region and the rest of the international community including Japan have decided to stand against it. For that

purpose our bilateral relations have expanded and encompassed cooperation in this field in the sense that the Djibouti authorities had granted all the necessary facilities to the Japanese forces engaged in this operation with which we share the objectives.

I express my gratitude to the Japanese people for providing to Djibouti support in the fields of education, infrastructure and economic cooperation at large. The projects implemented are directly serving the population of Djibouti by providing valuable services such as transportation with the new ferry boat and education. The cooperation with Japan is not limited to the government side but includes other types of cooperation with civil society and other organizations, such as AMDA-MINDS, a nongovernmental organization providing assistance to refugees, and the Tokyo University of Agriculture, working with local researchers for a greener land.

In 2009, the partnership with the largest Japanese medical group, Tokushukai, and the Ministry of Health of Djibouti was a concrete illustration of the multifaceted cooperation we would like to imprint on the bilateral relations between our two countries. This partnership was built on confidence and strenuous efforts led to the establishment of the second dialysis center in the country thanks to Tokushukai's donation of dialysis machines. The center was inaugurated last April and bodes well for the coming achievements.

One ambitious undertaking could be the opening of a hospital using the management and the advanced medical technology of Japan for the benefit of the local patients, most of whom would not have had the chance to get such a treatment unless they traveled overseas.

This proximity of basic services to the populations is the

raison d'être of the National Initiative for Social Development launched in 2007 by the president of the republic and which is at the forefront of the fight against poverty and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals in Djibouti. There have been a number of projects carried out under this new initiative with the aim of bringing the education, health care and water utilities to the poorest area of the cities and the rural localities. These projects have helped achieve positive results in the fields of child and maternal health, where the mortality rate has sharply diminished in comparison to previous years. The enrollment rate in elementary schools is more than 80 per cent, with an equal parity between girls and boys especially in the urban areas. However, there are real obstacles in tackling poverty, one of them being the high unemployment compounded by the recent economic crisis and the price hikes that are still lingering in the consumer market.

Despite these bad external economic conditions, the pace of economic growth was positive in 2009, around 5 percent, and is expected to be on the same line this year. The Djibouti free zone continues to receive more foreign firms wishing to establish there and use the Djibouti location as a center of distribution for products as well as a logistics platform.

The low investment flows registered during the world economic slowdown were compensated by other opportunities that will enable the launch of infrastructure projects. The shipyard project, with an estimated value of \$250 million, combined with a new port in the city of Tadjourah and express roads to the northern part of Ethiopia are part of these projects and will certainly enhance the gateway position of my country.

As other foreign investors are taking an interest in the strategic position of Djibouti, I would like to warmly



Bilateral relations: Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh meets Vice Minister of Defense Kazuya Shinba on his visit to Djibouti in December 2009. EMBASSY OF DJIBOUTI

invite Japanese companies to invest in Djibouti, the gateway to Africa.

In terms of integration in the region, this summer will coincide with the power interconnection between Djibouti and Ethiopia as a complementary supply to the local production of electricity. Well aware of climate change, Djibouti is developing its own renewable energy sources available in abundance, such as geothermal and wind. Not only is Djibouti reinforcing its commercial position in the region but it is also consolidating its position as a place for banking with a number of regional banks, setting their eyes on the many incentives and the liberal market that exists in Djibouti, opening branches. Since last year, three others have settled, increasing the overall number to 10 banks.

Convinced that these positive trends will persist during this 33rd year of our independence and beyond, I wish to congratulate the Djibouti's leadership and its citizens for their resilience and hard work toward creating a prosperous nation.



Regional hub: Located at the crossroads of key shipping routes, the port of Djibouti — run by Aden Ahmed Douale (inset), chairman of the Djibouti Ports & Free Zones Authority — links Europe, the Far East, the Horn of Africa and the Persian Gulf.

### Congratulations to the People of the Republic of Djibouti on the 33rd Anniversary of Their Independence



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