

Benin national day

Nation shows steady improvement but challenges remain

Alassane Yasso
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF BENIN

On Aug. 1, the Republic of Benin celebrates 50 years of independence. The people of Benin measure the impact of the sacrifices made by their illustrious seniors, the efforts achieved and the path they have run. They also consider the challenges, goals to be achieved and how.



On this solemn occasion, I would like to convey, as official representative of Benin in Japan and in communion with Beninese residing on the islands of Japan, my deep gratitude to His Imperial Majesty Emperor Akihito and the Empress Michiko, the Imperial Family, H.E. the Prime Minister Naoto Kan and his government, and to the people of Japan for their friendship, solidarity and support, resulting in significant achievements for the benefit of the people of Benin, and for their hospitality, which contributes to make our stay in Japan enjoyable and beneficial.

Bilateral and multilateral partners of our country, including Japan, have contributed a lot to building a modern, prosperous nation in Benin. Meanwhile, this country does not miss any opportunity to deliver its modest contribution toward a peaceful and harmonious progress in the world. As for Japan, a few highlights illustrate these remarks.

In the health sector, the hospital L'Hopital de la Mere et de

l'Enfant Lagune (HOMEL), as an illustration of Benin-Japan cooperation, was officially opened earlier this year by President Boni Yayi. This gem will participate in reducing maternal and infant mortality in Benin. At the same time, the government decided to grant delivery by cesarean section for the benefit of low-income families and free treatment for malaria to 5-year-old children. Also, Benin and Japan's partnership in providing drinkable water is in its fourth phase and is increasingly sought by people who still expect much more.

In the education field and capacity building, construction of classroom modules is ongoing and the Primary Education Teacher Training Project in Djougou enters its operational phase. This supports the president's decision of free primary education in accordance. In addition, training courses and exchanges of experience increase.

Regarding agriculture, the aim is to ensure food security through the promotion of some good practices and the culture of NERICA (New Rice for Africa) rice. Already, the acreage and yields are clearly improving.

The impact of these actions on the development of the country promises to be more sustainable and hence improve all internal efforts.

The opening on Jan. 1 of the resident Embassy of Japan in Benin undoubtedly strengthens and broadens the scope of this fruitful cooperation.

For its proper part, Benin, a least developed country, does



Benin President Boni Yayi

not skimp any sacrifice for creating conditions for such reinforcement. Furthermore, and despite its very limited resources, it feels a point of honor to make contributions, somehow modest, to carry out the noble ideals of the United Nations.

Benin, once known as "the sick child of Africa," has rediscovered virtues of the palaver tree and the culture of peace, nationwide reconciliation and tolerance. This helped the success of the historic National Conference of the Vivacious Forces in February 1990. As a peaceful transition to a multi-party democratic regime, respectful of human rights and proponent of the rule of law, the National Conference started by Benin has inspired many similar events in the world, especially in Africa. It is considered by specialists as one of the possible solutions to face situations of acute political crisis. In the same spirit, in December 1999, the memorable International Conference

of Leaders for Reconciliation and Development was held in order to settle the stigma of the painful period of slave trafficking.

Boasting political stability in a region with high turbulence, Benin is preparing a presidential and legislative coupled ballot in 2011. Taking advantage of this stability, the country has now acquired the status of a major troop contributor to the peacekeeping operations under the United Nations or regional organizations in Africa and beyond.

But poverty remains pregnant and some five years on, in 2015, it is not obvious Benin will achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals. It intends to keep this difficult challenge regarding education, gender equality, maternal and child health and AIDS. International assistance can help. Same for poverty. To achieve an emerging and prosperous economy by 2025, President Yayi planned to complement political democracy with economic renewal. Therefore, for an emerging Benin, he undertook to continue the implementation and realization of mere infrastructure highly needed, as to engage important structural reforms.

The main actions are:
— pursuing modernization and competitiveness of the Autonomous Port of Cotonou, lung of the national economy;
— rehabilitation of the railroad with about 10 locomotives acquired in the last two years and the Common Transport Benin-Niger Organiza-

tion (OCBN) being restructured. The railways and the road infrastructure will strengthen Benin's role as transit country for the hinterland nations: Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali.
— modernization of agriculture is engaged.

The opportunity to diversify the national economy lays on many factors of which tourism is one aspect. It's quite exciting to visit:

- International Market Dantokpa, with its hundreds of thousands of traders every day;
- The Royal Palace of Abomey, a UNESCO World Heritage, the Route of Fisheries and the Slave Route;
- Biosphere Reserve Pendjari (RBP), vaguely called Pendjari National Park (PNP), was classified in 1986 as a MAB Biosphere Reserve and therefore one of the first Biosphere Re-

serves at the international scale. The reserve retains biological diversity, including a complex of protected areas that is the best protected savanna in the region, well-known hunting areas (elephants, buffaloes, lions and leopards are met, as well as species becoming rare or endangered like cheetahs).

Let's keep in mind that the vision in the prospective study "Benin 2025: Alafia" sees that "Benin is, in 2025, a flagship country, a country well-governed, united and at peace, with prosperous and competitive economy, cultural outreach and social welfare." Beyond, the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved in the near future.

In order to realize an emerging economy that plays a major role in the West African regional market, the government in its "Agenda 2025 for an Emerging Benin" identified five clus-

ters for promoting economic renewal, apart from the promotion of human resources, which are:

- transportation, logistics services and trade;
- agro-food;
- cotton and textiles;
- the building and civil engineering works and the materials for construction; and
- culture, tourism and handicrafts.

To achieve these ambitions, public and private partnerships offer big opportunities. Beninese, private sector, local authorities and the central government will contribute to them, foreign investors also. I am confident that Japan will second the people of Benin, and boost its contributions directly, through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) process or through other channels. According to its faith in regional integration, Benin is an active member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with its market of about 300 million people, and

the first Francophone African country to undergo the Review APRM mechanism. Investors should be reassured by this additional evidence of credibility.

My staff and I are entirely at the disposal of all and we will welcome each interested party (tourists, investors or those wanting to explore the homeland of Rufin Zomahoun, of Euloge Yerima alias Lolo Adogony, Emmanuel Gbevegnon and other Beninese celebrities in Japan) for further information.

Finally, I would like to fulfill the pleasant duty to renew to Their Imperial Majesties, the government and the people of Japan the gratitude of the people of Benin, thankful for their assistance to achieve Benin's Millennium Development Goals.

To my Beninese brethren living in Japan and in other countries within the jurisdiction of this embassy, I recall the pride of the Benin nation for their daily honorable behavior in their countries of residence, I wish a happy national day.

LE PROJET DE RENFORCEMENT DES INSTALLATIONS ET EQUIPEMENTS DE L'HOPITAL DE LA MERE ET DE L'ENFANT-LAGUNE DE COTONOU EN REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN

NIHON SEKKEI, INC.

BUILDING SITE : COTONOU, REPUBLIC OF BENIN
CLIENT : MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN REPUBLIC OF BENIN
PRINCIPAL USE : MOTHER AND CHILD HOSPITAL
PROJECT PURPOSE : CONSTRUCTION OF TOP REFERRAL HOSPITAL

**Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Benin
on the Occasion of
the 50th Anniversary of
Their Independence Day**

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