

world/Colombia independence day

Colombia, a key partner for today's world

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AMBASSADOR OF COLOMBIA

On the occasion of the commemoration of 201 years of Colombia's independence, on behalf of President Juan Manuel Santos and the people of Colombia, I extend our greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial Family, Prime Minister Naoto Kan, the members of the government and the people of Japan.



I would like to express my deepest sympathy and my condolences to the Japanese people for the unfortunate disaster caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and by the subsequent tsunami and nuclear crisis.

Immediately after the disaster, reaffirming the continuous friendship and partnership between Japan and Colombia, the government of Colombia extended its assistance to the affected people by offering emergency relief supplies, which were distributed in the Tohoku area, including Fukushima Prefecture.

This very difficult time has also been an occasion in which the endurance, stoicism and discipline of the Japanese people could not only be observed but became a lesson to all nations. Japan is indeed a resilient country with the intrinsic capacity to rise again, as it has done before in different episodes of world history.

Our prayers and hearts go out to the victims and the bereaved. We are confident that Japan's determination and perseverance will allow the Japanese people to recover and rebuild very soon.

Commemorating the National Day is an opportunity to share with the readers of The Japan Times the vision Colombia has and its current situation. The government of President Santos, who was elected in August 2010, is based on the idea of "prosperity for all" and has been

devoted to the consolidation of the already positive stage that Colombia enjoys today.

The country has been able to accomplish extraordinary achievements in recent years, based on stable growth, a solid investment outlook and an aggressive strategy to consolidate the nation as an excellent trading partner.

Colombia's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 4.3 percent in 2010 and the GDP per capita has doubled since 2004. In addition to this, the World Bank recognized last year that Colombia was one of the nations with the highest level of improvements in its business environment. Additionally, the most renowned international rating agencies have raised the country's investment grade. The most recent case was by Fitch, which on June 22 upgraded Colombia's status, citing prudent economic policies and resilience to external and domestic shocks. On May 31, the same movement was made by Moody's Investors Service, a status previously granted by Standard & Poor's earlier this year.

All these credentials have made the country an excellent destination for foreign direct investment. In December 2010, Japan and Colombia concluded the negotiation of a bilateral investment agreement and a number of options in this regard are on the way to consolidation. Therefore, Japan is approaching the country with a renewed interest on a variety of promising sectors and projects.

In terms of trade, Colombia is reinforcing the many advantages it has, given its privileged location, and the policies that look forward to matching today's globalized world. By the end of this year, Colombia expects to have completed the negotiations of 11 free trade agreements (FTA) with 48 countries, gaining preferential access to over 1.5 billion consumers. In the case of the bilateral relation with Japan, Colombia maintains its interests and readiness to have an economic partnership agreement (EPA) with Japan.



Transformation: Medellin, the second largest city in Colombia, has become a city of new architectural projects. It is also the base of Colombia's fashion and textile industry. PROEXPORT

A new scenario where Colombia's leadership can clearly be seen is also evolving. After the dynamic growth of the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), a new group of six countries, called CIVETS, is emerging: Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa. According to experts, this group will become the future drivers of the world's economy.

Colombia, open and modern, is a flourishing nation ready to assume any challenge and prepared to engage even more with the Asia-Pacific region. The country's vision for 2011 is to play an active part in Asia's re-

gional architecture.

This engagement with Asia is a clear objective the government has established. Indeed, the National Development Plan 2010-2014 of President Santos recognizes the need to deepen international relations with this specific region of the world.

Consequently, the government has stated as a clear objective to enter the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), as well as establishing mechanisms of dialogue with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Furthermore, Colombia will keep placing great importance

on the use of forums in which it already takes part, such as the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, the Latin-Arch Forum, the Pacific Alliance (Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Peru), and the Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC).

The 2011 National Day marks then a renewed opportunity to make a clear statement regarding the nation's firm intention to further engage with Asia and to

reiterate the excellent bilateral relations that have been established with Japan.

The government of President Santos will keep looking forward, consolidating "prosperity for all," not only with the intention of accomplishing successful policies but with the aim of becoming a stronger partner for a globalized and dynamic world, in which Japan keeps being a remarkable leader.



Living history: Plaza de Bolivar in Bogota, the capital of Colombia, is surrounded by colonial architecture, including the National Congress building (right). PROEXPORT

Congratulations

on the 201st Anniversary
of the Independence Day of
the Republic of Colombia



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