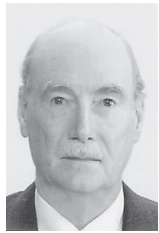


Zimbabwe independence day

Trade, investment opportunities abound for Japan's private sector

Stuart H. Comberbach
AMBASSADOR OF ZIMBABWE

On the occasion of the 32nd anniversary of Zimbabwe's accession to sovereign independence, I take the opportunity so kindly afforded by The Japan Times to extend warm, respectful greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as to the government and people of Japan as a whole.



Warm greetings as well to the small Zimbabwean community resident here in Japan and my thanks to them for the contribution each of them is making, in his or her own unique manner, to promoting the image and serving the interests of our country.

The past year has seen a growing level of contact and interaction between Japan and Zimbabwe, and a significant increase in private sector interest in the myriad trade and investment opportunities which now present themselves in our country. Several business delegations have traveled to Zimbabwe, following up on the large public-private sector mission of November 2010. Although still overly cautious and reliant upon what "others" say — rather than what those "others" do — the Japanese private sector is gradually waking up to the fact that while it continues to stand on the sidelines, endlessly weighing

the options, those options are rapidly being taken up by others — oftentimes even by those "others" urging caution upon the Japanese.

The mining sector, in particular, offers a tremendous range of possible engagement scenarios. Whereas the past two years or so have seen a satisfying increase in the level of importation by Japanese companies of our nickel, ferrochromium, graphite and, by way of processing plants in South Africa, our platinum, it is other Asian countries — India, China and South Korea in particular — that have taken the lead in terms of hard investment and in terms of securing for themselves long-term access to a range of strategic minerals and other natural resources with which Zimbabwe has been blessed.

The ongoing expansion and investment, both domestic and foreign, in the extraction and in-country beneficiation of these minerals — including a number of the so-called rare-earth minerals — will effectively enhance Zimbabwe's capacity to meet increasing global demand for these commodities, including demand by Japan.

The level of Japanese development cooperation has also increased over the past two years or so, with enhanced support and engagement in the fields of health, agriculture and — of particular importance and dimension — the wastewater treatment and management systems of Chitungwiza, a city adjacent to the capital, Harare, and home to



President Robert Mugabe of the Republic of Zimbabwe

more than a million people.

The past two years have also seen a most welcome increase in the number of Japanese tourist arrivals in Zimbabwe — with the world-famous Victoria Falls (which we are fortunate to share with our neighbor the Republic of Zambia) being, by far, the most visited of the region's many UNESCO World Heritage sites. Indeed, in recognition of the drawing power and the iconic importance of the Victoria Falls, the honor of hosting the 2013 United Nations World Tourism Organization's Annual General Meeting has been jointly awarded to Zimbabwe and Zambia, with preparations for co-hosting the meeting at Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe) and Livingstone (Zambia) already at an advanced stage. We look for-

ward to a significant Japanese presence and participation at the meeting.

Of course, the promotion and expansion of the tourism industry is a major component of the regional integration and broader development agenda of all southern African countries — as evidenced by the recent inauguration of the world's largest game park, the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, straddling the border areas of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Regional integration in all other spheres between and among the 15 member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) proceeds apace, as the region progresses steadily toward the creation of a SADC free trade area and, more ambitiously yet, a full common market arrangement incorporating the 26 member states of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community and SADC: effectively a free trade area stretching from Egypt in the north, all the way down the eastern side of the continent to South Africa in the south.

A recent SADC-Japan Infrastructure Investment Conference held in Tokyo, at which the enormous potential for public-private partnership arrangements between Japan, SADC countries and others was presented, was heavily oversubscribed — demonstrating, yet again, the growing awareness and interest of the Japanese private sector in investment opportunities in the

key sectors of transport, energy generation and distribution, and water and sanitation across southern Africa.

In terms of road and railway communication routes, Zimbabwe, of course, lies at the very center of the SADC region, providing vital import and export linkages for the northernmost countries of SADC and beyond with the eastern seaboard ports

of South Africa and Mozambique. Ongoing infrastructure developments within Zimbabwe and its neighboring countries — including projects financed by Japan — should serve to further enhance the process of regional integration and to facilitate the more rapid and more efficient movement of goods and people across our rapidly developing region.



Leaders: President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai talk in Harare on March 29. EMBASSY OF ZIMBABWE

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It is to be hoped that the government of Japan, eager to see the export of Japanese infrastructure technology, eager to see an expanded Japanese private sector activity in Africa, and eager to deliver a successful fifth edition of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V) in June 2013, will, in pursuit of all these objectives, engage in close consultation with its private sector, with TICAD

co-organizers — including, now, the African Union Commission — and with African countries themselves, in order to attain them, and in so doing, to ensure that Africa and Japan move more effectively toward the mutually beneficial strategic partnership we all seek.

Zimbabwe, at the very heart of the southern African region, will certainly continue to play its part in this endeavor.

Congratulations
to the People of the Republic of Zimbabwe
on Their Independence Day



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