

Ghana Independence Day

Ghana, Japan moving together in partnership, collaboration

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AMBASSADOR OF GHANA

On March 6, Ghana will celebrate 59 years of freedom since becoming the first sub-Saharan African country to achieve independence from British rule in 1957. This happy occasion marks that memorable and trail-blazing event on the African continent. Historians have agreed Ghana's independence sparked the "Wind of Change" that blew across the continent in the 1960s.

As we celebrate this auspicious occasion, let me take this opportunity, on behalf of the government and people of Ghana, as well as the Ghanaian community in Japan, to convey our warm greetings to their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial family, the government and people of Japan for the enduring hospitality extended to all Ghanaians who have visited Japan.

I also take this opportunity to reiterate Ghana's unflinching friendship with all Japanese people, to whom we extend deepest sympathies as we stand at the threshold of the fifth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. We especially empathize with those in affected regions and the bereaved families, who mourn their loved ones and continue their reconstruction in the Japanese spirit of resilience.

Indeed, Japan demonstrated the spirit of resurgence to the international community at the U.N. Conference on Dis-

aster Risk Reduction in Sendai last March. The visit of Ghana's Vice President, H.E. Kwesi Bekoe Amissah-Arthur, who led Ghana's delegation, reinforced the excellent relations between our two countries.

Ghana has seen its fair share of challenges and successes in 59 years of nationhood. The current global economic vicissitudes have negatively impacted Ghana with declining commodity prices and rising import costs. This has robbed the Ghanaian economy of the impressive growth over the past decade. The real GDP growth rate, which averaged 7 percent in recent years, is expected to be about 5.3 percent this year. However, Ghana has positive prospects in the medium to long term, as investors continue to show interest in Ghana. In 2014, foreign direct investment (FDI) stood at \$3.57 billion over 184 projects. Sixty-nine companies registered in our Free Zones Enclave in the past two years, taking advantage of the stability, peace and ease of doing business.

Ghana is among the top three African countries in attracting FDI, reaching in excess of \$10 billion over the past decade.

Ghana has focused on diversifying its economy, building a skilled, dynamic and hardworking labor force, supported by strong service and agricultural sectors. The government is pursuing prudent macroeconomic policies and taking financial measures to ensure stable and sustained development. Over the past few years, the government has focused on infrastructural development to support eco-

nomical growth, while consolidating the country's lower-middle-income status and expanding social intervention policies. In education, these include free, compulsory, universal and equitable access to high-quality education. In December, over 1,614 new basic schools were completed. About 100 million notebooks and about 12.5 million textbooks were given to basic school children in the past three years, while 2 million have received free school uniforms since 2010. Also, over the past two years, 60,000 laptops were given to basic school children in deprived areas, along with 10,000 locally produced sandals.

The economic policies have received the endorsement of the IMF, which recently favorably reviewed Ghana's economy and made the necessary disbursements via an extended credit facility last year. These achievements came against the backdrop of the drying up of aid and grants from our development partners, since the country attained lower-middle-income status.

Ghana has a strong political culture nurtured to support a vibrant multiparty democra-

cy, with values anchored in the rule of law, respect for human rights, press freedom and guaranteed individual liberties. These traditions evolved for more than 25 years, during which Ghana has undergone successive elections every four years, with power alternating between the two major parties. This year, the country will vote again in November and we expect peaceful, free, fair and credible results.

Internationally, Ghana is an active member of several international organizations promoting peaceful coexistence, scrupulous respect for international law and international norms, and peaceful resolution of disputes. The President of Ghana H.E. John Dramani Mahama last year completed a two-tenure chairmanship of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), undertaking a number of important initiatives. These included assisting to resolve sub-regional conflicts, spreading democracy and contributing to regional growth and development. Furthermore, in January, our president and Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg were appointed

by the U.N. to co-chair a group of advocates on U.N. sustainable development goals.

The charge of the embassy in Japan — to bolster over 50 years of excellent relations between Ghana and Japan — is an important plank in the country's diplomacy, and all are waiting for our president's visit to Japan to materialize this year.

With the cooperation of the Foreign Ministry, Japanese International Cooperation Agency and Japan External Trade Organization and oth-

ers, the embassy organized a Ghana Trade and Investment Forum in April. The forum attracted about 183 Japanese companies and investors. Deputy Minister for Trade and Industry Hon. Kwaku Ricketts Hagan and Deputy Minister for Finance Hon. Mona Quartey led the forum's delegation from Ghana. The forum boosted the interest of many Japanese companies to do business in Ghana, leading to an investment mission to Ghana in September, involving 32 Japanese companies

and investors. Since the mission, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation has provided about \$547 million to build Ghana's third floating, production, storage and offloading vessel to boost Ghana's oil production.

Significantly, these developments come at a time when officials of the two countries are far advanced in negotiations for the conclusion of a bilateral investment treaty between Ghana and Japan.


Apart from increasing bilateral trade, Japanese should also see Ghana as a favorable destination. Ghana is a peaceful country, with pristine beaches, UNESCO's World

Heritage sites, monuments to the slave trade, stunning game reserves and, above all, warm and hospitable people. The legendary Japanese spirit of *omotenashi* hospitality has the Ghanaian equivalent in *akwaaba*.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation to the corporate bodies, individuals and other collaborators, who in conjunction with The Japan Times, have facilitated the publication of this message and enhanced the image of Ghana.

Long live Ghana-Japan Relations; Long live Japan-Africa friendship and partnership.

Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Ghana on
the 59th Anniversary of
Their Independence



from the president and staff of
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