

Benin National Day

Working toward further good governance

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AMBASSADOR OF BENIN

Located in West Africa, the Republic of Benin celebrates on Aug. 1, its 56th independence anniversary.

On this unique occasion, on behalf of H.E. President Patrice Talon, his entire cabinet and the people of Benin, I consider this a special opportunity to send out a message of goodwill to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, H.E. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the government and to all those who are devoting themselves to promoting friendly relations between our peoples.

The year 2016 has been a

blessing since Benin has successfully held a presidential election. It was an honor for both the Benin cabinet and Benin people to welcome the Honorable Shinsuke Okuno, Diet member and former senior vice minister of justice, to the swearing-in ceremony for the new president on April 6.

The Benin people express their sympathy and brotherhood to the Japanese who suffered from the Kumamoto earthquakes in April.

Good governance

We should not forget that the administration of former President Yayi Boni Thomas has been highly respected in the international community. The current cabinet aims to further transform Benin's economy into an emerging one and the political system into a modern one.



President Patrice Talon

Readers may recall that Benin organized an economic roundtable in Paris in June 2014, at the end of which bilateral and multilateral public and private partners pledged to support Benin with \$12 billion to finance various projects and programs. The goal through 2019 is to accelerate economic growth to reach at least an 8 percent increase and to raise the current investment rate of 19 percent to 28 percent.

Among these partners called upon to support the various programs and projects, my country knows it can count on Japan and many other Asia-Pacific countries.

Indeed, the good cooperative relations, which have existed so happily between Japan and Benin since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1960-61, are the result of constructive political and cultural dialogue established between the highest authorities of our two countries.

It is glorifying that these re-

forms and policies have begun to bear tangible fruit in repositioning the economy and Benin has become one of the preferred destinations for foreign direct investment in Africa. The results of these reforms have quickly made Benin a stable, peaceful and democratic example in Africa. Thanks to much support, including that from Japan, Benin has never in history faced civil war and similar crises.

Friendly relationship

Japan and the Republic of Benin have developed and maintained excellent relations over the years, and today Japan has become a leading partner in our development efforts.

Let me take this opportunity to note my appreciation for the technical assistance provided through the Japan International Cooperation Agency; the actions of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers; the dynamic Beninese non-government organizations such as the IFE Foundation, through which Japanese volunteers go to Benin; and the Takeshi Japanese Language School (the only Japanese language school free of charge in Africa that was established in September 2003) to teach African people and all the foreigners in Benin Japanese language, culture and history.

Thanks to that, there are many Beninese students all over Japan who are majoring in agriculture, science, medicine and information technology.

My objectives as ambassador to Japan are to improve upon and also expand this positive

and mutually beneficial relationship between Japan and the Republic of Benin. Several high-ranking officials of Benin visited Japan and had discussions with their Japanese counterparts, while high-ranking government officials and senior parliamentary lawmakers of Japan visited Benin to continue gaining firsthand knowledge and understanding of the situation on the ground to help formulate appropriate responses to our country's development needs.

Development assistance

Japanese official development assistance to Benin through grants has been critical in the visible improvements achieved in our economic infrastructure, health delivery system, educational facilities and agricultural extension services over the last few years. Now Benin is in the process of becoming eligible for loans from both the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation.

Japan's assistance has helped lay the basis of the socioeconomic infrastructure in terms of efficient ports and harbors. The port cities of Cotonou, the largest city in the country, and Yokohama signed a joint statement for exchange and cooperation in November 2013.

Investors welcome

The Japanese government alone cannot fully bear the burden of reconstruction of the Benin Republic and provide for the needs and aspirations of the people of Benin. The private sector such as Keidanren, Keizai Doyukai, The Japan

Chamber of Commerce and Industry and JETRO and society, including nonprofit organizations, at large are urged to increasingly invest their enormous material resources and expertise in Benin's market, which is a gateway of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its 350 million consumers.

Benin is awaiting Japanese investors in all fields from agroindustry to tertiary services.

It is therefore clearly in the interests of both countries to work toward a more balanced economic relationship with increased trade. Benin has oil, cotton, gold deposits, quarries, shea butter, pineapples, moringa and many other resources.

My appeal to Japanese and Asia-Pacific investors and entrepreneurs in the private sector is to look beyond their immediate neighborhood of Southeast Asia and proactively target the nearly untapped, yet rich, natural resources.

The economic position of Benin is reinforced by its membership in the large market of ECOWAS and its 350 million consumers mentioned above. Given Benin's economic potential and its human resources, I am confident our cooperation will surely be strengthened and broadened with many other actions such as in the private sector where tourism, science and technology, new information and communications technology, textiles, energy and climate change offer real opportunities for partnership.

Spiritual closeness

Benin and Japan have many similarities concerning cultural val-



Cotonou in the southeast of Benin is the country's largest city, a transport hub and a gateway to a market of 350 million in West Africa. EMBASSY OF BENIN

ues such as commonalities between Beninese Voodoo and Japanese Shinto and in language, as Benin Yoruba and Fon have many words similar to the Japanese language.

Japanese tourists are warmly welcomed in Benin's south to visit sites such as the UNESCO World Heritage site, the Gate of No Return, which reminds us of the slavery-colonization history. In the middle of the country are the very famous royal palaces of the Abomey Kingdom and Das-

sa-Zoume Catholic pilgrimage site, while in the north, visitors are surrounded by the beauty formed by abundant natural resources, landscapes of rivers, fauna and the wonderful people of Benin.

Thank you very much and may God bless you in a very special way.

You can get in touch with the Benin Embassy through its website, www.beninembassy.jp. Email: abenintyo@beninembassy.jp



President Patrice Talon (second from right) shakes hands with Shinsuke Okuno (second from left), the special envoy of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, on the occasion of the investiture of the newly elected president in Cotonou on April 6. EMBASSY OF BENIN

Congratulations
to the People of the Republic of Benin
on the Occasion of the 56th Anniversary
of Their Independence

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