

Cuba National Day

An everlasting friendship between our countries

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Hernandez
AMBASSADOR OF CUBA



On Jan. 1, the Republic of Cuba, on its National Day, celebrates the 58th Anniversary of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, a historical process in which the Cuban people won their true and definitive independence, after more than 100 years of struggle.

On this remarkable date, I am honored to express, on behalf of the Cuban people and government, our best wishes for peace, prosperity and friendship to His Majesty Emperor Akihito, to whom I recently presented the letters accrediting me as ambassador of the Republic of Cuba in Japan, Empress Michiko and other members of the Imperial family, as well as to the government and people of Japan, who are so close to the hearts of all Cubans.

May my first words of gratitude go to the noble Japanese people, who from the first moments after hearing the sad news of the death of Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, has not ceased to transmit and express to us his

infinite signs of respect, solidarity and affection for Commander Fidel, as many have called him these days.

Hundreds of representatives of the most diverse sectors of Japanese society came to our embassy to pay tribute. Fidel felt a great love for Japan, a country he visited twice. His historic visit to Hiroshima in 2003 in which he paid a fair and well-deserved tribute to the innocent victims of the atomic bombings, on which occasion he wrote for posterity, "May such a barbarous act never again be repeated," has always been in the heart of all Cubans, Japanese and lovers of peace around the world. The Cubans, proud of having counted on his guidance and teachings, will continue to defend his legacy.

Cuba welcomes the progress achieved every year by the Japanese people in their commendable efforts to promote the recovery of the areas affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, while renewing and ratifying its solidarity with the victims. In more than 400 years of friendly relations, there have been many pages in which both countries and peoples have supported each other in difficult times. Just a few days ago, representatives of the highest level of our sporting world, including judoka Idalys Ortiz, wrestler Mijain Lopez, boxer Michel Lopez and former



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Cuban President Raul Castro in Havana on Sept. 22 EMBASSY OF CUBA

Cuban judo coach Ronaldo Veitia traveled to Japan to participate in a sports clinic organized under the "Support Our Kids" project, which they shared with 89 Japanese children from the Tohoku region. This attitude and unconditional commitment is already part of the legacy of solidarity and humanity in which all Cubans have been formed. Also recently, Japan was one of the first countries to come with their aid in support of the tasks of recovery and care for the victims after powerful Hurricane Mathew affected the eastern region of our country.

In the year that has just ended, the exchanges between the two countries have deepened, reaching a high degree of maturity that has allowed us to identify new potentialities for its expansion and consolidation in the most diverse areas, including economic and commercial. It is also a reflection of their own merits and the important consensus reached at all levels that should be reversed in new opportunities to continue developing relationships to new levels.

The historic visit made to Japan by the first Cuban Vice-

President, Miguel Diaz-Canel, the highest-level visit of a Cuban leader in the last 13 years, and the visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Cuba, the first of its kind in the long history of friendship between our two peoples, are an expression of the high priority accorded by both governments to develop historical ties of friendship and cooperation. At the same time, they mark the beginning of a new stage in which we hope to deepen our ties based on mutual interests and in the natural sympathy between Cubans and Japanese, which allows us to interact in a very special way.

In the economic and commercial fields, one of the most outstanding results has been the renewed interest of many of the most important and prestigious Japanese companies for the novel possibilities offered by the Cuban market. As a result, Japan was represented with the largest pavilion in its history at the International Fair of Havana, while the number of Japanese companies with representative offices in Havana also grew, with the opening of commercial offices of the pres-

tigious companies Mitsubishi, Marubeni and Mitsui.

This year the Portfolio of Opportunities for Foreign Investment was updated in our country, which already has 395 projects, many of which are of interest to Japanese companies. The special development zone located in the strategic port of Mariel is expected to play a decisive role in the future development of our country and provide a unique opportunity for foreign investors. Due to its important facilities and tax advantages, the zone saw important advances in hosting 19 companies that have begun their businesses with an investment of more than \$900 million, in addition to more than 20 projects that are in an advanced phase of approval.

Cuba continued to expand and improve the legal framework for the attraction of foreign investment, consistent with the updating of its economic model that will encourage the production of goods

and services to boost the economic and social development of the country. This will also allow access to modern technologies, forms and methods of business management, as well as help with the expansion of new sources of employment.

The recent successful conclusion of the second Japan-Cuba Joint Public-Private Committee Meeting, on the occasion of the visit to Japan of the Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment Rodrigo Malmierca, made it possible to confirm the extensive potentialities, as well as the willingness of both parties to start negotiating an Agreement for the Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investments between our countries next year.

Bilateral cooperation also saw renewed impetus, based on the willingness of both sides to continue to foster exchanges in areas of common interest, and to expand Cuba's access to new forms of cooperation. This is reflected in the forthcoming opening of a Japan International Cooperation Agency office in Havana and the execution of important projects related to the health sector, as well as in transportation, energy, agriculture and other areas.

Cuba aspires to continue expanding Japanese tourism, which at the end of this year recorded historic levels. The Japanese visitor, attracted by Cuba's exuberant nature, rich culture, traditions and deep history, will find in Cuba a happy, educated and hospitable people who will always receive them with open arms.

Despite the U.S. blockade, the global economic crisis and some distortion of the Cuban reality in the media, Cuba will continue to move forward with safe steps in updating its economic and social model, consolidating its prestige in the international arena.

Finally, I wish to reiterate to



Top: Havana Cathedral in the center of Old Havana; Above: A curing barn in the city of Pinar del Rio EMBASSY OF CUBA

you the esteem, respect and special consideration of all Cubans and its government, for the consistent and renewed expressions of solidarity and friendship with Cuba, received over time, from friendship organizations, members of parliament, political parties and Japanese society in general.

The friendship and solidarity with our country in Japan constitutes a fundamental pillar for the development of the bilateral relations in this new stage. We will never forget the deep symbolism embodied in the fact that the very day that the world voted with Cuba at

the U.N. demanding an end to the U.S. economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed for more than five decades, the Peace Boat arrived again in Havana, carrying its deep message of support and solidarity.

We are confident that this year, which has happily just started, will witness the continued strengthening of relations between Cuba and Japan in all fields and that the future of these relations will be as bright as the sun that shines on our countries, which are geographically distant, but very close in affection and friendship.



Cayo Guillermo, a cay of the Jardines del Rey archipelago EMBASSY OF CUBA

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on the 58th National Day of the
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