

Ghana Independence Day

Bright future for growing democracy

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AMBASSADOR OF GHANA

Today marks the 60th Independence Day Anniversary of Ghana, the first country in sub-Saharan Africa that shook off the British colonial yoke and set in motion events that changed the fortunes of the entire African continent. Ghana's independence was a defining moment in African history that changed the perception of the continent in global politics. Remarkably, this anniversary milestone has an added significance that resonates with the Japanese traditional celebration of *kanreki* that marks 60 years.

On this auspicious occasion, let me first and foremost seize this opportunity on behalf of the government and people of Ghana, the Ghana Embassy and the Ghanaian community in Japan, to convey our heartfelt greetings and deepest appreciation to their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the entire Imperial family, as well as the government and people of Japan for the hospitality extended to all Ghanaians who reside in, or visit Japan.

During the past year, the Japanese spirit of *tomodachi*, or friendship, was at play in Ghana-Japan relations. This was evident from our dealings with Japanese officials and the highest principals of our countries. I recall, in



this connection, the working visit to Japan of the previous President of Ghana H.E. John Dramani Mahama in May, during which our excellent bilateral ties were further reinforced. The visit built upon the tradition of other Ghanaian presidents who, over the past 25 years, have each paid official visits to Japan. We have no doubt that this tradition will continue under President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, who assumed office on Jan. 7 — almost exactly two months ago today — and has already renewed the former president's invitation for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to visit Ghana.

The election of Akufo-Addo as president of Ghana in the elections in December cemented Ghana's democratic credentials within the comity of nations. Ghana has for over a quarter of a century now, out of its 60 years of existence, practiced a multi-party democracy with smooth and seamless transitions of power from one elected government to another. This time, however, marked the first time that an incumbent president served just one term and lost an election to the opposition candidate.

The international community has acknowledged that the electorate and the Ghanaian populace as a whole were the true winners of the elections, having demonstrated political maturity in not only ensuring free, transparent and fair elections, but most importantly ensuring peace before, during and after the elections.

The country is developing and entrenching strong institu-

tions of democracy such as an independent electoral commission, independent judiciary and a free and vibrant press, as well as civil society organizations, all of which play supporting roles for the country's democracy to come of age. What the country needs now is the continued goodwill and support of the international community and friendly countries such as Japan, to cooperate with Ghana for the country to reap the benefits and fruits of democracy, often referred to as the "democratic dividend." Democracy needs to be supported by a strong economy as the facilitator of the dividend.

Ghana continues to be an exporter of raw materials with little value addition to the products. The country remains well endowed with natural resources such as gold, diamonds, timber and manganese and it has been a modest oil producing country since 2010. However, with the vicissitudes of the international commodity market and the unequal terms of trade skewed against developing countries, Ghana's economy, in spite of the modest growth rates achieved over the past two decades, remains fragile.

The overall structure of the economy has not experienced the dynamism needed to move from a lower middle-income to a higher middle-income status. The higher growth rates of about 7 percent, which it achieved in two decades have now been reduced to about 3.5 percent to 4 percent between 2015 and 2016. The medium to long-term prospects of the economy, however,

look propitious. The commitment to move away from the export of traditional raw materials to non-traditional exports, involving value addition and encouragement of indigenous Ghanaian industries, is an important plank in the strategy to inject dynamism into the country's developmental processes.

There is also the lingering realization that not all countries can benefit from globalization. Moreover, a diversified economy supported by fair income distribution and good human resource development will accelerate economic growth. The countries in the Asian region in particular provide enough evidence that with limited natural resource endowment, a country is capable of achieving phenomenal growth and moving from a third-world to a first-world economy, on the back of strong human capital. These are the examples Ghana deems worthy of emulating.

Though Ghana has since the early days of independence placed emphasis on providing her nationals with a solid educational foundation, there remains a gap in aligning the provision of education to the industrial and other growth needs of the country's economy. Ghanaian professionals can be found in various countries of the world and in a number of international organizations across the globe contributing their quota in different fields of endeavor as a result of the high-quality educational system in the country that served as a well-spring in developing their exper-

ience. While this is well recognized and appreciated there is the necessity to tailor the human capital to the country's growth needs in the coming years.

Consequently, the country has embarked on a restructuring of the educational system to provide the skills needed by industry. Not only do we have quality education at the tertiary level, there is also a strong emphasis at the basic and secondary levels. Ghana has a free compulsory universal basic education in the spirit of which some incentives have been provided to parents to enable them to send their children to school. These include provision of free school uniforms and textbooks, as well as free meals to schoolchildren, to relieve poor parents of some of the burdens in educating their children.

An important initiative of the president's regime is to introduce free senior secondary school education for all from September. It is expected that these educational initiatives will cater to the needs of Ghanaian society and assist in our march toward a knowledge-based economy. Achieving a knowledge-based economy will entail a great deal of advances in the technological field, for which cooperation with friendly countries such as Japan will be important.

Given the level of cooperation between Ghana and Japan over the years, Ghana has reason to believe that Japanese assistance and cooperation will be forthcoming in this and other endeavors. Indeed, during the visit

of Mahama to Japan last year, an agreement was signed between the two countries under a project for human resource development to the tune of ¥172 million, under the auspices of the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Over 300 Ghanaian youth will benefit from Japanese scholarships over the next three years. An educational fair was held on Feb. 15 in Accra to attract students to study at Japanese universities.

The government of Japan is also supporting Ghana in the area of promoting public health, in line with realizing universal health coverage in Ghana as a model country. In this connection, an amount of ¥2.28 billion has been granted for the purpose of constructing an Advanced Research Centre for Infectious Diseases at the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research. The Institute, built in honor of the Japanese icon Dr. Hideyo Noguchi, remains a lasting monument to Ghana-Japan relations, which can be traced to the research into yellow fever conducted by Noguchi in Ghana, long before the country's independence.

Another concrete manifestation of Japan's commitment to Ghana's development was the resumption of yen loans to the country, with an initial announcement of ¥100 million for the construction of a bridge over the Lower Volta River as part of the Eastern Corridor Road project that links parts of southern Ghana to the north and provides alternative routes to Burkina Faso and Togo as part of the West African Growth Ring Project. The project is another example of Japanese quality infrastructure projects in Ghana. Plans are also developing for the holding of an

infrastructure conference in Ghana by the Japanese government and private sectors this year, within the context of Japan's commitments under the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, or TICAD VI, process.

These governmental initiatives have also translated into increasing and deepening private sector interactions. On the occasion of Mahama's visit, a Ghana investment forum saw more than 200 Japanese companies participate. The governments of the two countries are committed to deepening of investments through the signing of an Investment Protection and Promotion Agreement, as well as an Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation. It is our expectation that the negotiations for the investment treaty, which have been underway over the last two years, will be concluded in the course of this year.

Another important development in our bilateral cooperation last year was the formation of the Ghana-Japan Parliamentary Friendship League under the Chairmanship of Hon. Manabu Sakai, with Hon. Dai Shimamura as the general secretary, and most importantly, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hon.

Yoshihide Suga as an advisor. The league, which has over 20 members from both houses of the Diet, has had a series of engagements, including a pre-inaugural meeting at the Diet, as well as interaction with Mahama during his visit to Japan. The leader of the league was sent by Prime Minister Abe as a special envoy to the inauguration of President Akufo-Addo.

In fulfillment of its mandate, the Ghana Embassy in Japan, in cooperation with various Japanese ministries, agencies and private sector operatives, will continue to bolster, deepen and sustain the spirit of friendship and excellent cooperation that has been the hallmark of Ghana-Japan relations during the 60 years of the country's independence.

Finally, let me avail myself of this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation to the corporate bodies, individuals and other collaborators, who in conjunction with the hardworking staff of The Japan Times, have facilitated the publication of this message and also to those who have sponsored other aspects of our 60th anniversary celebration.

Long live Ghana-Japan relations.

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to the People of the Republic of Ghana
on the 60th Anniversary of Their Independence



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