

(Anniversary special)

Côte d'Ivoire Independence Day

A stable and secure investment hub in West Africa

JÉRÔME KLÔH WEYA
AMBASSADOR OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE



As Côte d'Ivoire celebrates the 57th Anniversary of its Independence, The Japan Times recently had an opportunity to speak with Ambassador Jérôme Klôh Weya.

Do you have any message for our readers on your country's independence anniversary?

I would like first of all, on behalf of the President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, H.E. Alassane Ouattara, the Ivorian government and people, and myself to convey my heartfelt and respectful greetings to their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as the Imperial family and offer them my fervent wishes of health and continued happiness. I also extend my sincere greetings and thanks to Prime Minister H.E. Shinzo Abe, the government and friendly people of Japan.

Regarding The Japan Times' readers, I hope that this interview will expand their knowledge about Côte d'Ivoire.

Politics

What is the sociopolitical situation in Côte d'Ivoire in general?

The sociopolitical situation in Côte d'Ivoire can be described as a situation of strengthened political stability illustrated by the implementation of the new constitution of the third republic adopted in October. It establishes for the first time in the country's history the position of vice president. President Ouattara appointed former Prime Minister Daniel Kablan Duncan to this newly created position.

Furthermore, the reconciliation process initiated by the Ivorian government after the sociopolitical crisis of 2010 is still ongoing thanks to the awareness-raising efforts of the government.

How did the parliamentary elections of December 2016 go? Could you tell us about the outcome?

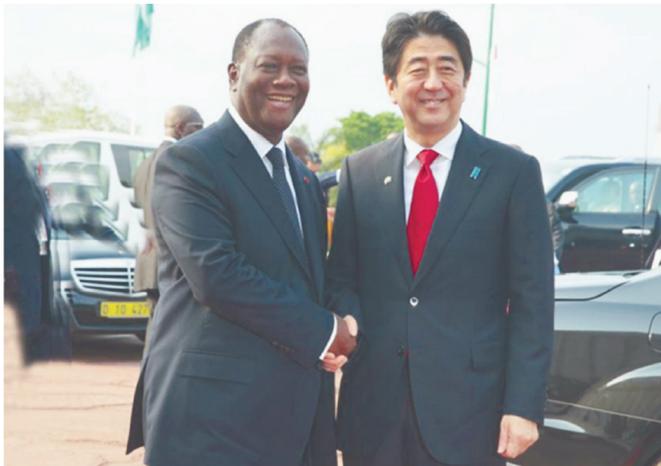
Following the reelection of President Ouattara to a second five-year term in October 2015, Ivorians turned out in December 2016 to peacefully cast their ballots to elect parliamentarians to the national assembly.

These elections resulted in a wide victory of the presidential coalition named the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace that won 167 out of 255 seats. This coalition is composed of the Rally of the Republicans, the party of President Ouattara, the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire-African Democratic Rally, the party of the former President of the Republic Henri Konan Bedie, and some minor political parties.

Economy

How is the socioeconomic situation in Côte d'Ivoire?

Since 2012, the economy of Côte d'Ivoire has continued to grow at an average rate that varies between 8.5 and 9 percent. This growth is driven by the continuation of major public building works in the framework of the National Development Plan 2016-2020, the improvement of the



President Alassane Ouattara and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe EMBASSY OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

business climate and the strengthening of political stability.

Despite the decline in cocoa prices in the international market, this growth continued during the first half of 2017 and economic activity remains strong.

What are some of the strong points of Côte d'Ivoire's economy?

Firstly, Côte d'Ivoire is rich in natural resources such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, cotton, palm oil, cashew nuts and bananas, as well as important oil and gas reserves and minerals in production. The country is the world's No. 1 producer of cocoa and the world's main exporter of cashew nuts.

Secondly, Côte d'Ivoire has an outstanding infrastructure. The country possesses an excellent road network, good communication services, particularly cellular phones and internet access. There are two major ports in Côte d'Ivoire, namely the Port of Abidjan, the second-largest port in sub-Saharan Africa after Durban in South Africa, and the Port of San-Pedro in southwest Côte d'Ivoire that specializes in the export of Ivorian cocoa.

Thirdly, Côte d'Ivoire is the gateway to the sub-regional markets, namely the West African Economic and Monetary Union market of 80 million consumers in eight countries sharing a common currency, namely the CFA franc, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) market of 349 million consumers in 15 countries.

Finally, we have the improvement of the business environment and governance, as well as an attractive investment code and strengthening political stability.

What are some of your thoughts on the outcome of the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI)?

TICAD VI took place last year in Nairobi, Kenya. The conference saw the remarkable participation of President Ouattara, who led an important Ivorian delegation much like he did at TICAD V in Yokohama.

The Ivorian delegation concluded several memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with Japan. These include, among others, MOUs between the Center for the Promotion of Investment in Côte d'Ivoire

(CEPICI) and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), between the Ivorian Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene and Marubeni Corp., and the upcoming signing of a MOU between the National Police of Côte d'Ivoire and NEC Corp.

Additionally, there was a bilateral meeting between President Ouattara and Prime Minister Abe, during which negotiations were announced for an upcoming signing of an investment agreement between Côte d'Ivoire and Japan.

How is the National Development Plan for the 2016-2020 period progressing?

To achieve its ambition of turning Côte d'Ivoire into an emerging country by 2020, the government has adopted for the period of 2016-2020 a new National Development Plan (NDP) designed to transform Côte d'Ivoire into an emerging country or a middle-income economy by 2020.

The challenges of this ambition are the structural transformation and diversification of the Ivorian economy, the strengthening of good governance, the improvement of the living conditions of the population, the promotion of youth and women, among others.

Thus, in the quest of the means for the implementation of the NDP, a meeting of the Consultative Group to fund the NDP was organized in May 2016 in Paris. On this

occasion, donors, including Japan, pledged to provide assistance in the amount of \$15.4 billion in grants and loans.

What are some of the advantages of Côte d'Ivoire for foreign firms considering investing in the economy?

The government of Côte d'Ivoire is actually working toward social peace and stability to foster a climate favorable to investment.

The Ivorian investment code under the supervision of CEPICI offers investors fiscal facilities and other measures to encourage and secure their investment in the country. For instance, foreign investors can set up businesses without having to partner with Ivorian nationals. They also have the right to repatriate their business profits without limitation.

Furthermore, in order to ease the investment procedure, CEPICI has established a one-stop shop for business start-ups, and particularly a "Japan Desk" within CEPICI.

In this regard, the Ivorian government invites the Japanese government and private sector to increase Japanese investment in Côte d'Ivoire.

Foreign relations

How are Côte d'Ivoire's foreign relations? What are some of the roles that Côte d'Ivoire can play in the African and international communities?

Côte d'Ivoire's foreign relations are stable. The country became a member of the U.N. just after its accession to independence in the 1960s and participates in most of the specialized U.N. agencies.

As a follower of the father of the nation, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, President Ouattara has been inspired by the principles of foreign policy set out by the former such as the openness to the rest of the world, peace, dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding.

Therefore, the government of Côte d'Ivoire is striving to maintain good relations with all countries in the world, including Japan. Under the leadership of President Ouattara, Côte d'Ivoire was elected in June as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council for the 2017-2018 period. The country intends to take advantage of its mandate to promote peace and stability in the world. I avail myself of this opportunity to convey to the friendly governments, including the

government of Japan, the sincere thanks and gratitude of President Ouattara for the valuable support given to my country.

At the continental level, Côte d'Ivoire gives greater importance to the promotion of peace, stability, economic prosperity and social progress in Africa in general and in the West African region in particular. In this regard, during his two-year chairmanship of ECOWAS, President Ouattara devoted himself to the restoration of political stability in the subregion.

Bilateral relationship

How is the relationship between Côte d'Ivoire and Japan?

Côte d'Ivoire and Japan have developed an excellent bilateral relationship since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in the 1960s. These relations have been consolidated by the visit to Côte d'Ivoire by Prime Minister Abe in January 2014 and the personal and remarkable participation of President Ouattara in both TICAD V in Yokohama in 2013 and TICAD VI in Nairobi in 2016. The bilateral meeting between the two leaders, as well as the signature of MOUs between the two parties during TICAD VI in Nairobi, are the sign of the excellence of the relations between Japan and Côte d'Ivoire.

Can you tell us about some projects that Côte d'Ivoire and Japan have undertaken?

The friendship between Japan and Côte d'Ivoire has resulted in the implementation of important projects such as the urban planning development project named "The Great Abidjan," the digital topographic mapping project for urban development, the project for the promotion of social cohesion in Abidjan and the center of the country.

Are there any new developments between Japan and Côte d'Ivoire?

In the framework of its ambition to transform Côte d'Ivoire into an emerging country by 2020, many key projects are underway with the assistance of the Japanese government. These include the construction of the Japan-Côte d'Ivoire Friendship Interchange in Abidjan, a grain terminal in the Port of Abidjan, a landing wharf in Sassandra in Southwest Côte d'Ivoire and the highway ring road as part

of the urban planning development plan of Abidjan.

Are there areas where Japan can be of further assistance?

In its efforts toward the development of Côte d'Ivoire, the Ivorian government places high priority on the industrialization and diversification of the Ivorian economy with a particular focus on the local processing of the agricultural, mining and energy resources.

In this respect, I would like to call on the Japanese private sector to take advantage of the business opportunities that are available in the country to contribute to the socioeconomic development of Côte d'Ivoire

I avail myself of this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to the government of Japan for its continuous support to Côte d'Ivoire directly or indirectly through the Japanese development agencies such as Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), JETRO and others.

How do you see the future of the bilateral relationship with Japan?

Japan is an important partner for the development of Côte d'Ivoire. Through his visit to Côte d'Ivoire, the Japanese prime minister has opened the way and sent a strong signal to the Japanese people in general and the Japanese private sector in particular. In this regard, I hope that the interest of Japanese private companies in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as Japanese investment, will increase in the near future.

I also invite the Japanese people to visit Côte d'Ivoire to discover the country's tourist assets and cultural heritage. The embassy is available to offer its assistance and provide further information to that end.

Do you have any final words for our readers?

To conclude, I express my sincere thanks to The Japan Times for its efforts to make this publication possible and to allow me to present my country to its readers. I finally convey my sincere gratitude to the companies such as Group CEMOI, Marubeni Corp., Mitsubishi Corp. and Ajinomoto Co. for their continuous support to the embassy and also their generosity in sponsoring this message.



Groundbreaking ceremony for the Japan-Côte d'Ivoire Friendship Interchange, attended by the Vice President of Côte d'Ivoire and the Ambassador of Japan to Côte d'Ivoire EMBASSY OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE



Model of the Japan-Côte d'Ivoire Friendship Interchange, which is under construction in Abidjan EMBASSY OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

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to the People of the
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on the 57th Anniversary of
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