

Benin National Day Special

Cooperation reinforced in various areas of mutual interest

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AMBASSADOR OF BENIN



Today, Aug. 1, we celebrate Benin's 58th Anniversary of Independence. On behalf of the government of the Republic of Benin and myself, I would like to extend my warmest congratu-

lations to the entire Beninese community residing in Japan.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty Emperor Akihito and members of the Imperial family, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the Cabinet and Diet members, especially the Head of the Japan-Benin Parliamentary Friendship League Katsuei Hirasawa. To the governors and mayors of cities who cooperate with our country, your valuable commitment to bilateral cooperation with Benin does not go unnoticed and is much appreciated.

On behalf of the government and people of Benin, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest sympathy and sincere condolences to the victims of the recent torrential rains, their families and the people of Japan.

It is with great pride that after 28 years of democratic stability, Benin is charting an exciting new chapter in its history. Indeed, I am convinced that the Benin of tomorrow

will be very different from where it is today.

There is no doubt that Benin's strategic location in West Africa, its human capital, political stability and heritage are significant assets to spur heightened economic growth and a better future for its people.

It is with this objective in mind that Head of State Patrice Talon launched the Government Action Programme 2016-2021, "Revealing Benin," in December 2016 as a development and investment program of unprecedented scale in the country's history.

Revealing Benin is divided into three pillars that are split into seven key priorities that act simultaneously in institutional, economic and social areas. It comprises 45 flagship projects in the economy's key sectors, 95 sector-specific projects, and 19 institutional reforms. The program involves a scale of investment never seen before in the country and is designed to boost employment, improve public well-being, create wealth and raise Benin's international profile. It is being implemented with the support of various private-sector partners. With a budget of 9.04 billion West African francs (\$17.37 billion), it will raise investment to 34 percent of gross domestic product (compared to the current 18.8 percent) through collaboration with private sector partners, who will provide 6 percent of the program's total planned investment.

The program is boosting Benin's economy with substantial impacts on nine key sectors: tourism, agriculture, infrastructure, digital economy, electric-

ity, living environment and sustainable development, international knowledge and innovation city named "Seme City,"

drinking water, and social protection.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries in 1961, Japan and Benin have shared similar values in various areas such as democratization, respect for human rights and cultural heritage, with regular exchanges between the officials of both countries.

As part of the implementation of its action plan, Benin counts on Japan, one of its most significant development partners. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries in 1961, Japan and Benin have shared similar values in various areas such as democratization, respect

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At the beginning of this year, a delegation of councilors from the Upper House of the Diet, led by Kiyoshi Ejima of the Liberal Democratic Party, inspected the official

development assistance efforts in Benin to assess the potential of the Japan-Benin relationship. More recently, in June, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Benin Aurelien Agbenonci visited Japan on the invitation of his counterpart Taro Kono, and was accompanied by the Minister of Economy and Finance Romuald Wadagni. During their stay, they not only met with high-level Japanese authorities, but also engaged with representatives from organizations, including the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Japan External Trade Organization, Japan Bank for International Cooperation and some private companies. Additionally, with regards to the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, Benin has been a high-level attendee of every summit since its creation in 1993. During our minister of foreign affairs and cooperation's visit, mutual commitments were taken to reinforce the coop-

eration in this framework.

Overall, we hope that this is just the beginning of a renewed partnership and that more Japanese companies will visit, explore and take advantage of Benin strategic location to access the West African market.

Today, Benin's political, social and economic outlook is favorable and promising. For example, policymaking in Benin has improved significantly since 2016, and the government has been focusing on strengthening public governance and accountability. On the economic side, reforms have been implemented to support growth and fiscal consolidation under the "Revealing Benin" program. Under this program, efforts include the improvement of tax collection and the business climate, setting up commercial courts and passing a series of decrees and laws to increase transparency, including on public procurement.

Moreover, it is projected that Benin's real GDP growth will average about 6.3 percent from 2018 to 2021, supported by both public and private investments, which will improve infrastructure and boost the tertiary sector. We firmly believe these reforms will raise foreign donors' and investors' confidence, especially given Benin's strong record of broad geopolitical and democratic stability. In that context, Japanese companies and enterprises, public and private entities are most welcome.

As we accelerate our vision onward and upward, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to work to deepening the Japan-Benin bilateral relationship and cooperation in all fields.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.



Aerial view of the Atlantic Ocean along the coastline of Cotonou, Benin. GETTY IMAGES

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