

# Gabon independence day

## Vision helps lead emerging Gabon

Jean-Christian Obama  
AMBASSADOR OF GABON TO JAPAN

Aug. 17 is the day we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Gabon's independence from France. Indeed, it is on that day that H.E. Léon M'ba, by then prime minister and the first president of the Gabonese Republic, and the

High Representative of France Senior Minister André Malraux signed in Gabon the official document transferring sovereignty rights to the young Gabonese Republic. On this auspicious occasion, it gives me again a great pleasure to address the readers of The Japan Times and convey, on behalf of the President of the Gabonese Republic H.E. Ali Bongo Ondimba, the government, and the Gabonese people, our best wishes for peace, good health and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as to the rest of the Imperial household. We also wish to extend our warm greetings to the Japanese government led by Prime Minister Naoto Kan, the Diet members and the friendly people of Japan as a whole.

In the same vein, our heartfelt greetings go to the small community of fellow Gabonese compatriots, namely students in Japan, as well as to the officials and many friends of Gabon in Indonesia and Malaysia, countries that belong to our diplomatic constituency.

### Recent developments

Since my last article in The Japan Times, Gabon has gone through a political transition after the death of President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba in June last year. Thus, under the supervision of the interim president, H.E. Rose Francine, then president of the Senate, and the transitional government led by

H.E. Paul Biyoghe Mba, the prime minister, a presidential election was held in late August 2009, which ultimately resulted in the victory and the swearing in of H.E. Ali Bongo Ondimba as president of the Gabonese Republic on Oct. 16, 2009.

The new president, guided by the political manifesto "Gabon: the Future in Confidence" on the basis of which he was elected, has outlined his vision and set out priorities for the government to make Gabon an emerging economy in the medium term. These priorities are framed around three main pillars: Green Gabon, focusing on the protection of the environment, ecotourism and the diversification of a sustainable forestry industry; Industrial Gabon, focusing on locally processing raw materials, such as timber and minerals; Gray Gabon of value-added services, aimed at providing high-tech service industries as well as a hub for financial institutions and related activities.

Based on these three pillars, a government economic and social program has been launched and is being implemented, which is putting emphasis on enhancing good governance and diversifying the economy away from the dominant oil sector. Thus, agriculture is being revitalized for creating employment and improving food security while fisheries and aquaculture activities are being modernized. The establishments of local processing industries, namely in the oil, mining and the timber sectors, is also being encouraged. In the forestry sector, a decree banning the export of round logs was issued early this year with the main objective being to diversify forestry activities by creating local, dynamic, small- and large-scale processing industries.

In the process of taking Gabon further, the necessary steps are being envisaged to attract foreign investment and



**Anniversary: The official logo celebrating 50 years of the Gabonese Republic**

consolidate relationships with all willing partners. Critical areas are being prioritized. First, building economic infrastructure is considered to be a key element for boosting private sector-led economic growth, promoting services and expanding the small and medium-size enterprises, among others. Gabon needs all kinds of infrastructure, including in particular paved and feeder roads across the country. In this regard, 40 percent of the 2010 government budget has been allocated to improving infrastructure, namely the transport facilities, the electricity and water supplies and information and communication technologies (ICTs) for positioning Gabon as a financial hub in Central Africa.

Second, education and health are also on the top list of priorities in the government's program. These two sectors required new direction, investments and partnerships, so as to make them more in line with the economic development requirements of the nation. It is in this context that a National Forum for Education, Research and Coherence between Training and Employment was held from May 17-18 in Libreville, which has proposed a program of action to the government covering the period 2010-2025.

Reforms have also been introduced in the administration to improve efficiency and pro-



**History: The then Prime Minister of Gabon Léon M'ba (right) and the High Representative of France Senior Minister André Malraux sign Gabon's Independence Declaration in Gabon on Aug. 17, 1960.**

ductivity. The size of the government has been reduced and a census has been launched with the view to streamlining the civil service. Moreover, among a series of changes, new working hours have been introduced with the implementation of a "continuous working day." All in all, the president's plan of action for giving a new impetus to the country and boosting economic growth is on track.

### Green commitment

By devoting more than 12 percent of its territory to the creation of 13 national parks, a decision made by the late President Omar Bongo Ondimba in 2002, Gabon has been forcefully implementing a national strategy for environmental conservation.

The new president has decided to build on that strategy with the view to further enhancing the management of Gabon's forests and the development of ecotourism. In this regard, at the Copenhagen summit in December last year Gabon played a leading role in the negotiation process of global issues relating to climate change. Indeed, the main message delivered by President Ali Bongo Ondimba at the said summit was that climate change is no longer a climate, that "all countries have a moral obligation to act."

Also, as far as Gabon is concerned, the president declared

that "Gabon has already done much to reduce emissions and to stabilize forest cover and, with or without help, we plan to do more." To that end, right after Copenhagen, Gabon has taken further steps in launching concrete initiatives at home as part of its strategy to combat climate change. Thus, a National Council for Climate Change has been created and a Satellite-Image Reception Center of Excellence to monitor tropical forest coverage in Central African countries is also being established. This Earth observation project is benefiting from the technical and financial support of three main partner countries: France, Brazil and Japan.

Moreover, ahead of the December 2010 U.N. Climate Change Conference to be held in Mexico City, Gabon will organize from Sept. 6-8, in Libreville, an International Conference on Biodiversity. This conference will be followed by the COP10 Ministerial Conference on the same subject to be held in Nagoya in October.

Gabon, as a rain forest nation, is endowed with an exceptionally rich biodiversity that it is willing to share with the rest of humanity. The 13 national parks and other protected areas are truly making Gabon the "Mecca of nature" suitable for the development of ecotourism. This land has for centuries been heaven for a diversified fauna, including more than a thousand bird species, the famous Assala elephants with round ears, tree gorillas, chimpanzees and various other pri-

## President's plan for global sustainable development

Ali Bongo Ondimba  
PRESIDENT OF GABON

Effective resource management is fundamental to realizing the full value of this global interest in our continent and its riches. We must ensure we manage our resources well. We must establish the right regulatory systems to maximize our returns and ensure equitable development. Without development, there can be no guarantee of security. Where there is poverty, there will always be a greater risk of conflict. The need to build strong institutions of state and to develop and maintain professional and disciplined security forces is of paramount importance. We must avoid the illegal exploitation of Africa's resources, which inevitably results in a spiral into conflict.

Africa will be the continent most affected by climate change and we must do everything in our power to mitigate its impact



**H.E. Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic**

while urging the rest of the world to work alongside us in recognition of the fact that their carbon emissions affect us the most. African countries host 16 percent of the world's forests. Eighty percent of Gabon is made up of tropical rain forests. We have designated 11 percent of this as national parks and a further 3 percent as other protected areas, and have more

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified, sustainable, managed logging concessions than Brazil. Avoiding deforestation in my country and the wider Congo Basin region, which is the largest carbon sink in the world after the Amazon, provides one of the most effective means available to minimize carbon emissions and combat climate change.

mates that are being studied by many researchers, including those from the University of Kyoto in collaboration with the Gabonese national institute for scientific research and technology (CENAREST).

### Japan partnership

2010 also marks the 42nd anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Gabon and Japan. Thus, for more than four decades, our two countries have managed to forge a successful friendship and partnership. The strength of the bonds lies on mutual respect and a shared vision of international issues, including economic cooperation, peace, human rights and the environment.

Indeed, there are many assets for establishing a solid partnership with Gabon: first, a stable political and democratic environment created over years; second, investment opportunities in several sectors, including mining, oil, gas, timber and ecotourism.

Regarding trade and investment, relationships have over the years shown a growing trend, thus confirming their

complementary aspects and mutual interests on both sides. As a reminder, Gabon's exports to Japan include crude oil, manganese, timber and fish, while Japanese exports to Gabon include, generally, cars, electronics and heavy equipment.

Strengthening the partnership through foreign direct investment from Japan to Gabon could increase trade further. In that context, companies such as Mitsubishi Petroleum Development Corp. (MPDC), which has established two representative branches in Gabon, is now engaging itself on a larger scale of oil exploration and development activities. ERAMET-Japan is also intensifying its manganese activities in Gabon. Other potential partners, such as Sojitz, are also showing keen interest in investing in Gabon in various fields.

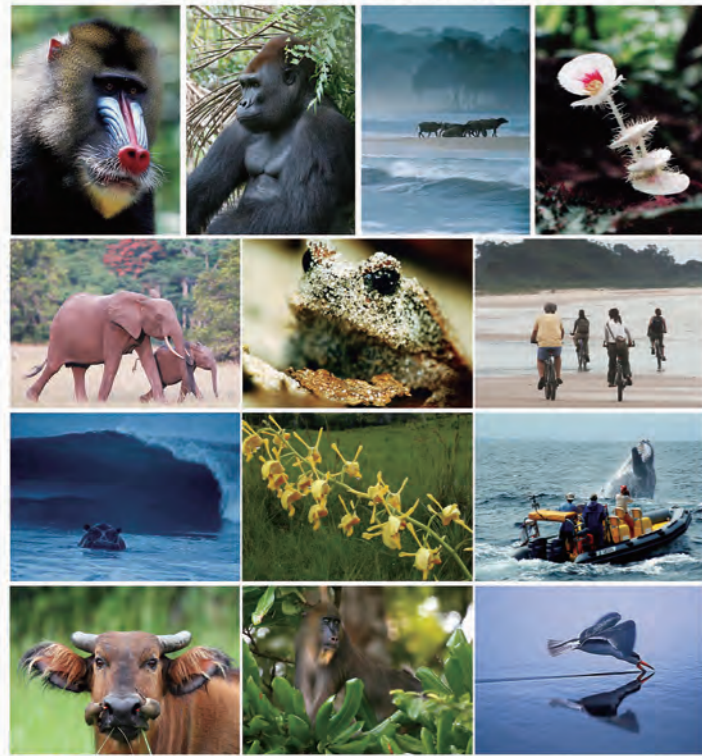
In the area of cultural exchanges, Gabon highly values

the ongoing technical cooperation with the Japanese government agencies, namely the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Overseas Fisheries Cooperation Foundation (OFCF). This exemplary cooperation, which is already producing tangible results in maintaining and building fishing centers in Gabon, should be expanded further to other sectors.

To this end, Gabon is already benefiting from the JICA's Young Volunteers Program. Currently 25 of those Young volunteers are working in Gabon in various fields. Moreover, a Technical Cooperation Agreement has already been signed by our two countries. This agreement is expected to expand the partnership between Gabon and Japan through the JICA's Senior Volunteers program for development projects in education, infrastructure, agriculture and environment.

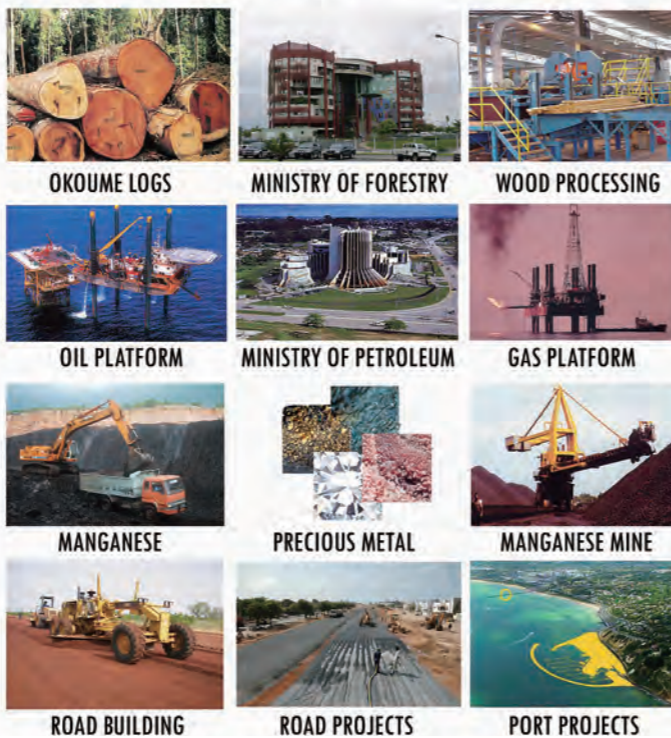
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to the Republic of Gabon  
on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary  
of Their Independence Day



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