

Zimbabwe independence day

Offering prayers, condolences to the people of Japan

Stuart H. Comberbach
AMBASSADOR OF ZIMBABWE

On the occasion of the 31st anniversary of Zimbabwe's accession to sovereign independence,



I take the opportunity so kindly afforded by The Japan Times to extend warm, respectful greetings to Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor

Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as to the government and people of Japan as a whole. My warm greetings also to the small Zimbabwean community resident in Japan and my sincere thanks for their discipline, courage and sense of community over the past several weeks.

As the government and peo-

ple of Japan continue to come to terms with the tragic aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, and while staff at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station continue their nothing-short-of-heroic efforts to bring the damaged plant under control, it seems inappropriate, somehow, to focus attention anywhere else but on those events, and on the tragic loss of life and the devastation inflicted in a few terrifying minutes on that day in the northeast of the country.

From Zimbabwe, on behalf of all Zimbabweans, both President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai addressed messages of condolence

and sympathy to Prime Minister Naoto Kan and, through him, to the government and people of Japan. In addition, hundreds of well-wishers visited the Embassy of Japan in Harare to pay their respects and to append their signatures and personal messages of support and solidarity in the Book of Condolences opened by the embassy.

Japan has always been a true friend of Zimbabwe, eschewing the rather strident, prescriptive tones adopted by some of our critics for a quieter and altogether more effective form of critical engagement, designed to assist and to encourage, rather than to punish and aggravate.

Our country, of course, continues to navigate its way through difficult political and economic waters: the politics characterized still by unrelenting external interference in our affairs, and the economics complicated by a range of declared and undeclared sanctions and measures imposed upon key components of the inclusive government and the



Leaders: President Robert Mugabe (center), Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai (left) and Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara make up the Inclusive Government of Zimbabwe. EMBASSY OF ZIMBABWE

broader economic infrastructure — the principal purpose of which appears to be to sow division and discord within the national unity administration.

Notwithstanding these efforts to destabilize the country, the economy is performing reasonably well, witnessing significant progress in the agricultural and mining sectors over the past 12 months and set now to post growth in excess of 7 percent this year, buoyed mainly by firming global commodity prices and the concomitant increase

in investment in the agricultural, manufacturing, mining and minerals sectors in Zimbabwe.

The government has never swayed from its core policy that Zimbabwe's wealth — in terms of the majority ownership of its natural resources — belongs, first and foremost, to Zimbabweans. This does not mean, as some of our detractors have said, that foreign investment is unwelcome. On the contrary, Zimbabwe is very open to foreign investment across the entire range of economic activity and, conscious of the importance of clear and consistent investment policies, is working hard to clarify and to demystify our much-misrepresented indigenization policy.

We were delighted to welcome a Japanese trade and investment mission to the country toward the end of 2010. A number of company-specific followup visits have taken place since that time and continue to generate confidence that the Japanese private sector, too, acknowledges and understands the trade and investment

opportunities that abound in Zimbabwe and indeed across the entire increasingly integrated Southern African region.

Just as Japan was coming to grips with the enormity of the reconstruction and regeneration tasks that lie ahead within the country, so too was it fulfilling long-standing commitments in Zimbabwe: additional support for the health and agricultural sectors on one hand, and the provision of additional fire-fighting and emergency service vehicles and equipment on the other.

The symbolism, let alone the fact of these expressions of support at this time, albeit long ago planned and agreed to, are not lost on Zimbabweans, who have welcomed them with sincere appreciation and gratitude as further concrete evidence of the underlying friendship and solidarity of Japan with the people of our country.

The global outpouring of sympathy for and solidarity with Japan has been remarkable, and justifiably so. On so many occasions, in so many parts of the world, when disaster has struck — be it man-made or natural — Japan has always been among the very first responders: always quick, always effective and always generous. And it is only right, therefore, that now in Japan's own time of need, there should be a similar response from across the globe.

The continent of Africa has for decades benefitted from Japan's generosity and support, encapsulated so effectively within the TI-

CAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) process, under which every pledge or commitment made by successive Japanese administrations in terms of support for Africa's development agenda has always been fully honored and implemented.

It has been of considerable comfort, then, to note the many offers of practical, concrete support made by a number of African countries in the wake of the March 11 tragedy and to know that many of these offers — be they contributions of cash or of products and/or materials needed to assist those most directly affected by the disaster — have already been implemented.

Here in Japan, my African Diplomatic Corps colleagues and I took a collective decision to cancel the celebratory events being planned to mark Africa Day 2011 and to donate the budget set aside for those events to the earthquake and tsunami relief fund established by the Japanese Red Cross Society.

Although little more than symbolic in nature, this contribution was motivated by a very genuine spirit of condolence, sympathy and solidarity with a people who have done so much, over such an extended period of time, for so many across our continent.

More recently, together with the president of Peace Boat and a number of my colleagues from North Africa and the Middle East, we visited Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, carrying relief supplies and a message of support and encouragement to the mayor and the courageous

citizens of that ravaged area.

For those of us who experienced the quake itself — albeit from the relative safety of Tokyo — and for those who, with each passing day, have witnessed the amazing resolve, resilience and calm stoicism of the Japanese people in the face of such tragedy, these past weeks have been nothing less than inspirational.

No doubt, every one of us will have a particular memory of 2:46 p.m. on March 11, 2011. For me, it is the discipline and quiet dignity of dozens of Japanese citizens, inching their way, step-by-step, down the emergency stairwell of a downtown Tokyo hotel behind an elderly man, his leg in a plaster cast, being assisted by hotel staff as, all the time, the building swayed and cracked round them. There was no raised voice, no sign of panic and no attempt made to push past the elderly man to safety.

So many other images of this traumatic period will remain, forever, in our minds: heart-rending images of bewildered survivors of the wave, often searching against hope, for their loved ones; heart-lifting images of miraculous escapes; truly humbling, heart-warming images of compassion and kindness offered and accepted between and among individuals and communities — often strangers, but all victims, and all survivors of these cruel events.

Zimbabweans everywhere, but most especially the small community resident here in Japan, pray that recovery will come quickly and I believe we can all be confident that, in time, the amazing people of this country will, in their own determined, inimitable manner, succeed in the task of rebuilding and in moving forward once again.

Congratulations to the People of the Republic of Zimbabwe on Their Independence Day

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Peace

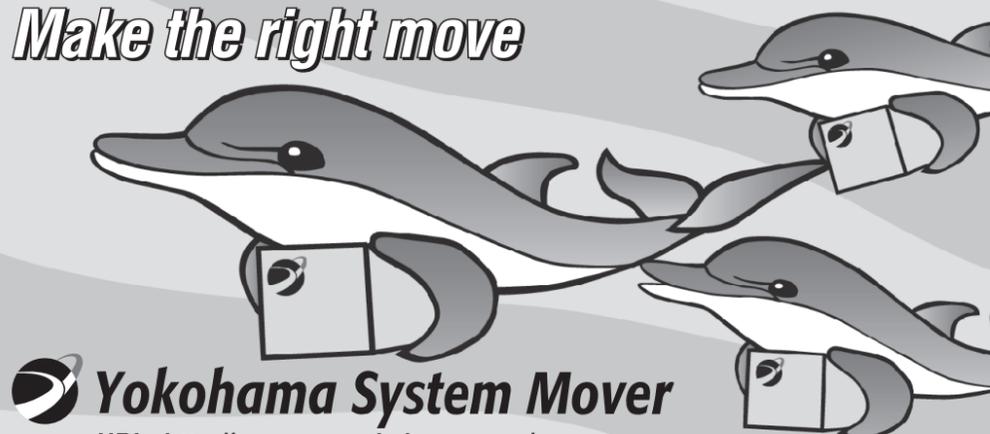
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Support: Zimbabwe Ambassador Stuart H. Comberbach (fifth from left), with ambassadors from North Africa and the Middle East, and Tatsuya Yoshioka of Peace Boat meet Mayor Hiroshi Kameyama (fourth from left) in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, on April 11. EMBASSY OF ZIMBABWE