

South Africa national day

Important partners work together in all areas

Gert Johannes Grobler
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SOUTH AFRICA

As South Africa today celebrates the 17th anniversary of Freedom Day, which commemorates South Africa's first democratic elections held in 1994, I would like to extend on behalf of President Jacob Zuma and the government and people of South Africa our best wishes to Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the government and the people of Japan during this very difficult period after the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11. Our heartfelt and deepest condolences to all who lost their loved ones as well as to those who have lost their livelihoods. Our collective thoughts and prayers are with you every day as you overcome all the hardships and deal with the effects of the devastating earthquake and ensuing destructive tsunami and nuclear disaster. We were fortunate in that the small South African community in Japan, some of them near the areas that were hardest struck, are all right. All of us have been impressed by the calm courage and the spirit of community as well as resilience that Japanese people have displayed at this time. This has earned you the respect of the international community.



Japan's peace credentials and its own generosity to other nations in times of need are well-known and it is incumbent on the international community to now stand by Japan in its hour of need. We therefore deployed Rescue South Africa, a highly professional search and rescue team, to Japan, which together with embassy officials made constructive contributions, especially at Sendai port and airport and in Natori, Ogatsu and Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture. The team were able to witness the difficult conditions in the north, which included adverse weather conditions and the threat of radiation. Through their efforts, Rescue South Africa contributed to the massive and overwhelming relief effort that is under way. It was moving to see the appreciation for these efforts from the Japanese government and people.

Embassy officials also met the mayor of Iwanuma City, Miyagi Prefecture, at an emergency evacuation shelter and presented him with a Jabulani 2010 soccer ball with the inscription "Never give up," on behalf of the embassy and the people of South Africa. The soccer ball is a symbol of inspiration to the people and the youth of Iwanuma City and of our hope that happiness ("jabulani") will return to Japan. It can be recalled that South Africa successfully hosted the first-ever FIFA World Cup to be held on the African continent in 2010 and the spirit of unity in South Africa and with all nations was an important feature of the soccer world cup. Japan's Samurai Blue demonstrated the can-do spirit that we witness here today in the real struggle that people are facing to survive

and that will ensure you will ultimately succeed. Japanese are no strangers to catastrophes, enduring not only natural disasters but also being the only nation to have suffered a nuclear attack, but they have shown throughout history that they will endure, reconstruct and become stronger as a result. Rest assured that we as South Africans have been with you during this time and will be beyond. My government and the people of South Africa sincerely wish to expand our relations and friendship with this great country and its wonderful people, and we are dedicated to do so. Japan is an important partner for South Africa and relations are excellent. Last year, we celebrated 100 years of official relations between our two countries and elevated bilateral relations to a strategic level. Bilateral relations have a strong economic focus with Japan being one of South Africa's top three trading partners globally

too, is known for overcoming difficult challenges in the past. South Africa is now recognized as the Rainbow Nation and many visitors come to experience this extraordinary environment where diverse people live together as one. Japan is also, particularly during this difficult time, showing the world how people united can better serve each other. Our ties of friendship continue to grow and the number of Japanese visitors to South Africa increased by more than 34 percent last year when South Africa successfully hosted the soccer World Cup.

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Helping hand: Staff members of Rescue South Africa are greeted at Narita airport upon arrival March 18 by Ambassador Gert Johannes Grobler before beginning search and rescue operations in Miyagi Prefecture. EMBASSY OF SOUTH AFRICA

— Japan was No. 1 in 2008 with a total trade of 106 billion rand. Japanese companies invested almost 28 billion rand in South Africa in 2010. Where the creation of decent jobs is our government's top priority, there remains huge potential to further expand the already substantive economic interactions.

It is encouraging to sense that Japanese companies, strongly supported by the Japanese government, are increasingly exploring business opportunities in the emerging economies *inter alia* in Africa with a strong focus on South Africa.

It is intended to step up the level and frequency of political

consultations between our two countries, not only on bilateral issues but also on Africa and other major international issues that require global consensus, such as the restructuring of the global financial architecture (we are both members of the G-20); U.N. reform; nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament; and climate change. It is also important in this context to mention that South Africa recently became a member of the BRICS Group (with Brazil, Russia, India and China) and is aligned with its goals to advance the restructuring of the global governance institutions, notably the global economic and financial architecture into one that is more equitable, balanced and rests on pillars of multilateralism. South Africa will also endeavour to ensure that the BRICS agenda is aligned with the development and economic priorities of Africa, such as the creation of productive capacity on the conti-

ment, infrastructure development and job creation.

Japan has helped our young democracy in important areas of science and technology cooperation, education and skills development and various other sectors, and Japan remains committed to continue cooperation with us to build a sustainable democracy. This is valued by the South African people. Japan is also involved with South Africa and Africa through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TI-CAD) process and despite its

own current challenges, Japan will continue to acknowledge the importance of remaining committed to Africa.

I thank The Japan Times and our supporters for this opportunity to address you on Freedom Day and to encourage all Japanese to persevere during this difficult time. I look forward to the friendly people-to-people cooperation that continues to grow. This year we will not host a reception for our national day but we intend to rather make a financial contribution to the victims of the national disaster.

Ties of friendship continue to grow along with feelings of solidarity

Bradley Brouwer
SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM REGIONAL MANAGER
FOR ASIA-PACIFIC

My deepest sympathy goes to everyone affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. South Africa intends to support Japan during this difficult time with the spirit of solidarity that defines our national identity. This spirit was forged as we overcame difficult hardships as a nation, which culminated in our first democratic elections in 1994, which we celebrate today as Freedom Day. Japan,

too, is known for overcoming difficult challenges in the past.

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South Africa is a country blessed with marvellous scenic beauty and a warm, comfortable climate. It is a vibrant land full of wonderful surprises. There is much to encounter in South Africa, including our internationally renowned wildlife, the multicultural Cape Town at the foot of Table Mountain and several World Heritage sites. I hope that more Japanese will visit South Africa. The beautiful lilac flowers of the jacaranda bring life and color to South Africa much as the cherry blossoms signal new life and beginnings for the Japanese.

We proudly celebrate South Africa's 17th Freedom Day Anniversary. Our Best Wishes to South Africa! We also take this opportunity to offer our deepest sympathies and support to the people of Japan.

Gambare Japan!



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