

South Africa national day

Inspiring new ways, showing anything is possible

Mohau Pheko
AMBASSADOR OF SOUTH AFRICA

Eighteen years ago, the world witnessed the spirit of reconciliation, tenacity and determination of the South African people to the birth of a new South Africa, the Rainbow Nation. As South Africa celebrates Freedom Day, April 27, I take this opportunity, on behalf of President Jacob Zuma, the government and the people of South Africa, to express our best wishes to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and the government and people of Japan.

This year marks 102 years of an excellent friendship between South Africa and Japan. The depth and importance of this relationship were tested by the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent disasters of March 11, 2011. South Africa's commitment to Japan and solidarity to its people were illustrated by the timely despatch to Japan of a 45-member team, Rescue South Africa. Drum Café, known for African interactive drumming, has continued to assist schools, senior homes and temporary shelters to deal with the emotional scars of this tragedy. On April 27, 2011, the president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Madame Sadako Ogata, was presented by President Zuma at the National Awards Ceremony with the Grand Companion of O.R. Tambo (silver) award for friendship and commitment shown to South Africa. These selfless acts today stand out as symbols of "ubuntu"/"kizuna" (oneness of humanity/bonds) between our two countries.

South Africa has shown the world that adversity can be over-

come and that it's possible to rebuild broken lives and to face the future with courage, boldness and determination.

Economic relations

Japan continues to be a top trading partner for South Africa and will remain so in the years ahead. South Africa enjoys a trade surplus with Japan, and in 2011, Japan was the highest foreign direct investor in South Africa. South Africa is Japan's most important trading partner in Africa. Our two countries will continue to explore opportunities to further deepen and widen the economic cooperation.

Our government's New Growth Path will address economic challenges and also respond to the challenges of regional integration. The key elements of the New Growth Path include infrastructure development, diversifying the industrial base, efficient use of resources including mineral beneficiation, agricultural development, and regional economic integration. South Africa's Industrial Policy Action Plan and a focus on green jobs will build stronger, more diversified, labor-absorbing industries. The capital investment program for 2010-2013 will see the government spend \$114 billion on public infrastructure.

We are a young nation, yet in 18 years, we are the world's 26th largest in population and 29th largest economy. Our per capita gross domestic product (GDP), corrected for purchasing power parity, positions the country as one of the 50 wealthiest in the world. Our currency is still among the top best performing emerging market currencies of the 26 monitored by Bloomberg. Our tax revenue has increased by 220 percent in the last 11 years.

Global strategic management consulting firm A.T. Kearney ranks us as the 18th most attractive destination for foreign direct investment. South Africa

is ranked 35th out of 183 countries for ease of doing business according to a joint publication of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation. According to the Open Budget Index, South Africa has the most transparent budget in the world. The Global Competitiveness Report 2010/11 indicated that South Africa has the 34th most efficient government out of the 139 countries ranked. Our vibrant democracy tolerates high levels of contestation. This strength affords us 31st place out of 184 countries, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Survey of Democratic Freedom.

In terms of the Global Competitiveness Report 2012, South Africa's biggest improvements over the past year have been reliability of police services (104 to 95); brain drain (62 to 48); intensity of local competition (63 to 49), availability of latest technologies (51 to 39) and gross national savings as a percentage of GDP (98 to 72).

Furthermore, South Africa has 45 million active cell phones (population 49 million), 66 color TVs per 100 households, nine telephone lines per 100 population and 90 mobile telephone subscribers per 100 population.

These developments and figures create and show a sound environment that offers very attractive investment opportunities for Japanese companies in a number of sectors in South Africa.

Bilateral relations

In 2010, during the first official visit by a serving Japanese foreign minister to South Africa, then Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada and South Africa's International Relations and Cooperation Minister Maite Nkomo-Mashabane elevated our relationship to a strategic cooperative partnership, with room to further expand and deepen our relations. The two countries also signed a Technical Cooperation

Agreement that will further facilitate and streamline development cooperation.

The bilateral mechanism that regulates relations between South Africa and Japan, the Partnership Forum, enables a formal framework for high-level contacts and discussions between our two countries to strengthen our bilateral and multilateral cooperation and increase dialogue over a wide range of issues.

South Africa is a member of IBISA (India, Brazil and South Africa), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the Group of 20, and currently a nonpermanent member of the United Nations Security Council. South Africa successfully hosted the U.N. Conference on Climate Change COP 17 in 2011 and is the first country in the world that voluntarily and unilaterally gave up its nuclear weapons capability.

Synergies exist with Japan on multilateral issues such as United Nations reform and peace in the world; climate change and global warming; nonproliferation and disarmament; human rights, human security and sustainable development; and reform of the global financial architecture.

South Africa acknowledges Japan's constructive approach toward the challenges facing the continent particularly through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) process, which has brought benefits to Africa. We look forward to the next TICAD ministerial meeting due to be held in Marrakech, Morocco, in May, where preparations for TICAD V will start.

South Africa's sincere desire is to step up the level and frequency of the political consultations with Japan on bilateral and multilateral issues related to the African continent and to pressing global issues.

Sports

South Africa is a proud sporting

nation and continues its interaction with Japan in various exciting sporting sectors such as soccer, rugby, golf, running, surfing, bicycling and solar racing.

Sport exchange has emerged as a key element of our friendship. South Africa has successfully hosted several mega sporting events, including the FIFA Soccer World Cup in 2010. A growing number of Japanese are experiencing the numerous professionally organized sporting events on offer such as the world's largest individually timed cycle race (the Cape Argus Cycle Race), the world's largest open water swim (the Midmar Mile) the world's largest ultra-marathon (the Comrades Marathon) and the world's longest race for solar-powered vehicles (4,087 km of public roads).

Tourism

The number of tourists visiting South Africa has grown from 3.9 million in 1994 to 11.3 million in 2010 and ranked 24th in terms of tourist arrivals. South Africa is ranked among the top five countries in the world in respect of tourism growth (growing at three times the global average). The increase from Japan for the period 2010-2011 was 34 percent. The number of Japanese tourists to South Africa for the 2011-2012 period is expected to increase.

It is especially in the area of meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) that South Africa has established itself as a preferred international conference and event venue. Two exciting awards were bestowed on South Africa in 2011 in the area of tourism, namely, Cape Town being chosen the top tourist destination in the world at the Traveler's Choice Destinations awards and Table Mountain being selected as one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature.

Education

South Africa offers excellent ter-

tiary education and our universities are world-class. The University of South Africa (UNISA) is a pioneer of tertiary distance education and is the largest correspondence university in the world, with approximately 300,000 students. The first MBA program outside of the United States was started by the University of Pretoria in 1949. Stellenbosch University was the first African university in the world to design and launch a microsatellite. We stand ready to receive Japanese under- and postgraduate students in our Universities with proudly South African hospitality and warmth.

Science and technology

South Africa and eight African partner countries are bidding to cohost the Square Kilometer Array (SKA). The hosting of the SKA in the African continent is expected to bring about a technological revolution through smart design engineering, co-location of technologies for socioeconomic impact, and skills development, among others.

In the area of research and development, South Africa is inviting Japanese postdoctoral students to develop and expand their international study and research. At the same time we have seen an increase of South African postgraduate students undertaking masters and doctoral studies in Japan. In the near future we hope to see joint research cooperation between South Africa and Japan in platinum group metals and titanium, and in laser manufacturing technology.

The best way to describe my country is that nothing about South Africa and her people is ordinary. We thrive on inspiring new ways of doing things and I look forward to achieving the objectives as set out above for the mutual benefit of our countries.

In conclusion, I would like to thank The Japan Times' readers for their interest in South Africa.

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of the Freedom Day
of the Republic of South Africa



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