

Benin national day

Benin awaits more Japanese partners in its development process

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AMBASSADOR OF BENIN

The West African country the Republic of Benin celebrates today, Aug. 1, its 52nd independence anniversary. On this unique occasion, on behalf of H.E. President Yayi Boni, and on behalf of the government and people of the Republic of Benin, I consider this a special opportunity to send out a message of good will to the Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, to H.E. Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, to the government and people of Japan and to all those who are working hard to promote good relations and understanding between our countries and peoples.

A moment of silence

I would like to express the sympathy and brotherhood of the Yayi government and people of Benin toward the Japanese people who suffered from the March

11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and the July 2012 Kyushu flood victims. May their souls rest in peace.

We should note that from the inception of the administration of President Yayi and since his re-election in March 2011, the government aims to transform the Benin economy into one of the emerging economies and the political system into a modern one. It is glorifying that these reforms and policies have begun to bear tangible fruits in repositioning the economy and has become one of the preferred destinations for foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa. The results of these reforms have quickly made Benin a stable, peaceful and democratic reference in Africa. Because of this President Yayi received from his colleagues of Africa a mandate as chairperson of the African Union. Since then, he has been strengthening peace and democracy in Africa. Therefore, the African Union needs the support of the international community, of which Japan is an important member of all the decisions for democracy and peace in the world.



Benin President Yayi Boni

Japan and the Republic of Benin have developed and maintained excellent relations over the years since 1960 and today Japan has become a leading partner in our development effort. Japanese official development assistance (ODA) to Benin, both in the grant and loan forms, has been critical in the visible improvements achieved in our economic infrastructure, health delivery system, educational facilities and agricultural

extension services over the last few years. My objectives as the ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to Japan are to improve upon and expand this positive and mutually beneficial relationship between Japan and the Republic of Benin.

Several high-ranking personalities of the new administration in Benin visited Japan and had discussions with their Japanese counterparts while senior Japanese parliamentary lawmakers and vice ministers of foreign affairs visited Benin in order to continue gaining firsthand knowledge and understanding of the situation on the ground to help formulate appropriate responses to our country's development needs.

Investors welcome

The Japanese government alone cannot, however, fully bear the burden of reconstruction of the Republic of Benin to provide for the needs and aspirations of the population. The private sector, like Keidanren and JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization), and civil society (nonprofit organizations or nongovernmental organizations) at large must increasingly invest their enormous material resources and expertise in the Benin market, which is the gateway to 350 million consumers. This will help to alleviate poverty and reduce frustration and tension not only in Benin, but also in West African countries — maybe even for the whole African continent.

Benin is awaiting Japanese investors in all fields from agro-industry to tertiary services.

As indicated above, Japan's ODA to Benin over the years has helped lay the basis of the socio-economic infrastructure in terms of efficient ports and harbors. It is, therefore, clearly in the inter-

est of both countries to work toward a more balanced economic relationship with increased trade (oil, cotton, gold mining, stones, all kinds of beverages, foods such as cashew nuts, pineapples, etc.).

My appeal to Japanese investors and entrepreneurs in the private sector is to look beyond their immediate neighborhood of Southeast Asia, positively target the almost untapped natural resources and investment opportunities in Africa (the Republic of Benin has all kinds of raw materials in its soil) and become development partners even as the Japanese government is a partner in the public sector.

The economic position of Benin is reinforced by its membership in the large market of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) mentioned above. Given Benin's economic potential and human resources, I am confident that our cooperation will surely be strengthened and broadened with many other actions, such as in the private sector where tourism, science and technology, news technologies of information and communication, textiles, energy and climate change offer real opportunities and are indicated for partnership.

Best wishes for TICAD V

Finally, I would like to seize this opportunity to inform Japanese people that the Yayi administration is doing its best to encourage all African leaders and the business communities there by personally campaigning here in Japan for the success of the fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V).

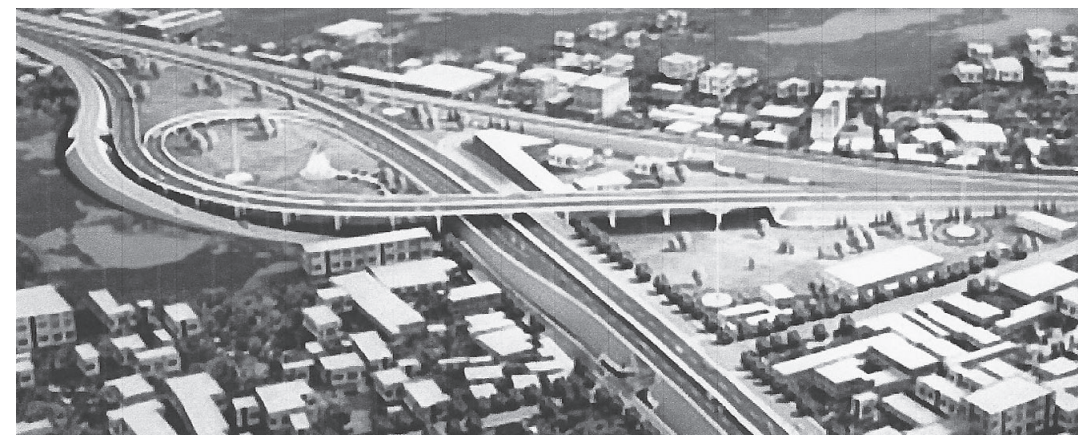
Regarding the promotion of exchange between Benin and Japan, it is important to recall the existence of the people-to-people axis fed by the technical assistance provided through JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), the action of Japanese volunteers and by some dynamic Beninese NGOs like the Foundation IFE, through which Japanese volunteers go to Benin Takeshi Japanese Language School to teach Japanese language, culture, history and so on. Thanks to that, there are many Benin students all over Japan who are majoring in agriculture, science, medicine and information technologies.

Once more, I would like to wish prosperity to Benin-Japanese peoples and, therefore, full success to TICAD V.

You can get in touch with the Benin Embassy through its website www.beninembassy.jp.



Economic center: Cotonou in the southeast of Benin is the country's largest city, a transport hub and a gateway to 300 million consumers in West Africa. EMBASSY OF BENIN



Infrastructure: Rehabilitation and expansion of one of the most congested road sections along the corridor between Godomey and Pahou is being conducted under the World Bank's funding.

EMBASSY OF BENIN

**Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Benin
on the Occasion of
the 52nd Anniversary of
Their Independence Day**

 **TODA**
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PROJET DE RENFORCEMENT DES CAPACITES
DE L'ECOLE NORMALE D'INSTITUTEURS A DJOUGOU

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