

Rwanda national day

Rwanda: A bright rising economic star of Africa

Charles Murigande
AMBASSADOR OF RWANDA

Rwanda recovered its independence from Belgian colonial rule on July 1, 1962. Unfortunately the immediate post-independence regimes pursued the colonial "divide and rule" policy, which in 1994, resulted in one of the most brutal and swift genocides of humanity. On July 4, 1994, the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), under the leadership of H.E. President Paul Kagame, stopped the genocide against the Tutsis, liberated the country from the genocidal forces and undertook the long and difficult journey of reconciliation, rebuilding and development.

This year's anniversary is special in the sense that we are celebrating the 52nd Anniversary of Rwanda's Independence while at the same time celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Liberation of our country from the genocidal forces.

On this occasion, it is a great honor and privilege to convey to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial family, the Cabinet and the people of Japan the warmest greetings from the government and people of Rwanda.

I also wish to take this opportunity to salute H.E. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, for undertaking an official visit to Africa in January, as promised during the fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V) Summit last year. This is a welcome demonstration of his personal and his administration's commitment to Africa's development.

Rwandans are using this celebration of the 52nd Anniversary of the Independence and the 20th Anniversary of the Liberation of Rwanda from genocidal forces to reflect on Rwanda's post-independence history, our struggles and challenges and the lessons we learned as a people determined to forge a brighter future.

While learning from the failures of the post-independence leadership, which resorted to a divisive ideology that resulted in unspeakable pains to Rwandans, we focus on post-genocide reconstruction efforts that have enabled us to attain commendable achievements, unimaginable 20 year ago. Based on the fact that there was no blueprint on how to rebuild a post-genocide society, Rwandans have had, with zeal and determination, to think out of the box and initiate home-grown solutions to the intractable problems they faced. They looked at and borrowed from their rich tradition, the principles that enabled the adoption of policies for restorative justice and reconciliation (Gacaca Courts); national solidarity and self-sustenance (Ubudehe, Umuganda); soci-

etal performance contract (Imihigo); and others from which a new and hopeful Rwanda has emerged.

The message that Rwandans would like the world to retain from this year's commemoration of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis and celebration of the liberation of their country is that Rwanda has moved from hopelessness to hopefulness. This was possible due to collective efforts and determination of Rwandans that decided to take their destiny in their own hands and think big for their country.

The new Rwanda is known not only as a peaceful, stable and rehabilitated nation, but also as a fast developing country with sustained economic growth, stable inflation and solid exchange rates. Rwanda is a responsible global citizen making highly appreciated contributions to world peace through various U.N. peace-keeping operations in Sudan, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Haiti and other countries. Recent global Gallup surveys have shown Rwanda in the top of the list of countries where citizens are most likely to feel safe and optimistic about the future and, in particular, Rwandan women are most likely to say they feel safe walking alone at night.

To nurture such a peaceful and hopeful society, the leadership of Rwanda determined that the government should be close to the people and new economic opportunities should serve all Rwandans. Rwanda has one of the most efficient decentralized local governments. Local communities have been empowered to choose their own development priorities and the leaders to execute them. Women are playing their rightful political, social and economic roles. Women represent 64 percent of the parliament and Rwanda has achieved gender parity in many other sectors of life, especially in education.

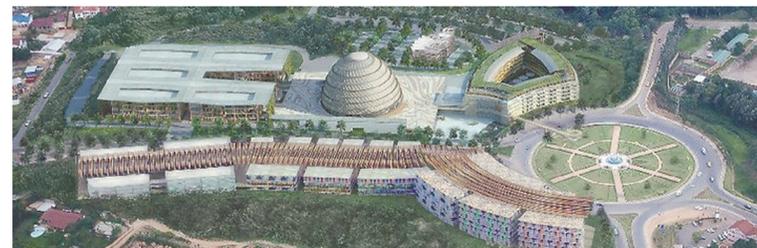
In 2000, the government adopted a program for the country's development, Vision 2020, which aims at transforming Rwanda from an agriculture-based, low-income economy to a knowledge-based, service-oriented, middle-income economy. The economy has been growing at an average rate of 8 percent per year and by 2013 per capita income had reached \$681 from \$220 in 2000, showing that Rwanda is well on its way to achieving its vision of becoming a middle-income country.

This has been an inclusive growth translating into the direct improvement of the daily lives of ordinary Rwandans across the country. Access to health and education has expanded tremendously as Rwanda established community-based universal health coverage, resulting in a sharp decline in infant and maternal mortalities. Rwanda has also achieved Universal Primary Education (UPE) and is on its way to achieving Universal Secondary Education (USE) by 2020. By investing about 10.2

percent of its budget in agriculture, Rwanda has achieved food security for her people. Just between 2006 and 2011, one million people were lifted out of poverty. Rwanda is one of the few African countries that are likely to achieve most of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Vision 2020 sets out to build a private-sector-led and knowledge-based economy. Today Rwanda's business climate is considered one of the best in Africa. According to the 2014 Doing Business Report, Rwanda is the second easiest country in which to conduct business in Africa after Mauritius. Globally, Rwanda ranks 32nd, which places it well ahead of some countries in Europe such as France, Belgium and Italy; Latin America (Brazil, Argentina) and even Asia (Indonesia, India). Similarly the Economic Freedom of the World 2013 Report and the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report both rank Rwanda second in terms of economic freedom and most competitive country respectively in Sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of this excellent business environment, foreign direct investment has been steadily increasing.

Rwanda is one of the handful of African countries with a fiber optic network backbone covering the entire country and linked to undersea cables. Following the June 2013 deal between Rwanda and Korea Telecom Corp., at least 95 percent of Rwandan citizens will have access to 4G-LTE high-speed broadband by December 2015. This is a major milestone in Rwanda's drive to become a modern, knowledge-based economy. This expansion of Rwanda's information infrastructure will help create jobs, propel economic growth, support social progress and ensure efficient and transparent social service delivery.



The Kigali Convention Center is nearing completion. EMBASSY OF RWANDA



Above, President Paul Kagame (right) receives the 2014 World Telecommunication Information Society Award in May at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Geneva. Right, the mountain gorilla is one of Rwanda's leading tourist attractions. EMBASSY OF RWANDA



There is no doubt that Rwanda still faces enormous socio-economic challenges and this year's Liberation theme "Together, We Prosper" reflects this realization, but the achievements mentioned above serve as an inspiration and create unwavering confidence that our collective efforts will surely attain our shared goals of building a harmonious and prosperous society.

Rwanda's success of the last 20 years was also partly due to the support of our friends and partners from around the world and from both private and public institutions. This support is always cherished and appreciated.

Our embassy is currently focusing on mobilizing the Japanese private sector to be part of this partnership. In June, in collaboration with the Japan External Trade Organization

(JETRO), our embassy organized Rwanda-focused Business Investment Seminars in Tokyo and Kobe. These seminars showcased Rwanda's impressive business environment and untapped investment opportunities in infrastructure (energy, roads, railways and airports), agro-industries, mining, information communications technology and tourism.

As we did during these seminars, we would like to take this opportunity to call upon members of the Japanese private sector to take advantage of Rwanda's conducive business environment and use Rwanda as an entry point to the larger and potentially lucrative markets of the East African Community; the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa; and the Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries.

It also gives me pleasure to invite Japanese tourists to visit Rwanda, famously known as the "land of a thousand hills, a million smiles and home of the famous mountain gorillas," and enjoy our unique Rwandan hospitality.

Before we conclude, we wish to express our profound gratitude to the government and people of Japan for the support they have extended to us in our quest for economic development and we highly value your continued partnership.

Finally, we take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to various institutions, companies and individuals in Japan for their support and business engagements in Rwanda, particularly to the management of Zensho Group, Toyota Tsusho Corp. and Mitsui Co. for sponsoring the publication of this article.

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to the People of
the Republic of Rwanda
on the 52nd Anniversary
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and 20th Anniversary
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