

Kenya National Day

Thriving Kenya-Japan ties

S.K. Maina
AMBASSADOR OF KENYA

Dec. 12th marks the 52nd Independence anniversary of the Republic of Kenya. Accordingly, on this auspicious occasion, I wish at the outset to convey warm greetings and best wishes to Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as the government and friendly people of Japan. I also take this opportunity to pay special tribute to all Kenyan nationals living in Japan for their determined commitment to Kenya's cause, and the distinguished readers of The Japan Times.

As we celebrate this event, I wish to reflect on our cordial relationship with Japan, which dates back to immediately after the attainment of our independence. Indeed, our collaboration has continued on an increasingly upward trend beyond the confines of official development assistance programs to more strategic partnerships based on mutual respect, common trust and shared values. This is clearly manifested through enhanced engagements between the business communities in both countries and the exchange of high-level visits by high-rank-

ing state and government officials, as well as by top business executives, in the recent past.

Notable examples of successful exchange visits and engagements in the last year alone include an official visit to Japan by H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta in March for the Disaster Risk Reduction Conference in Sendai; an official visit by H.E. First Lady Margaret Kenyatta in August for the World Assembly for Women conference in Tokyo; and the inaugural visit to Kenya by the new Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) President Shinichi Kitaoaka. There were also various ministerial official visits and Kenyan Seminars in Japan on: energy, the Kenya Ports Authority and special economic zones. In addition, the Kenya-Japan Business Forum, as well as round-table discussions between top Japanese business executives and our president were held in Nairobi.

Our two countries' commitment to strengthen strategic partnerships is also evidenced by heightened bilateral engagements in support of Kenya's development blueprint, "Vision 2030," in key areas such as hydro and geothermal energy development, the oil pipeline project, the expansion and modernization of Mombasa Port and its surrounding areas, agricultural development, human resource development

and health reforms.

As the gateway to Eastern and Central Africa, Kenya occupies a special position in Japan's diplomatic relations with Africa. Today, Kenya hosts one of the largest Japanese communities in Africa (about 700 people) and is the regional headquarters for all of Japan's major agencies (JICA, JETRO and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation), as well as its largest trading houses. Currently there are approximately 50 Japanese companies operating in Kenya, the second largest number in sub-Saharan Africa. Japan is now Kenya's leading development partner, particularly in the five priority areas of the economic infrastructure, agriculture, health, education, and the environment.

This strong momentum is a clear demonstration of our two countries' earnest efforts in deepening further mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields of development. Kenya for its part has prioritized its engagements along the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) framework upon which it is furthering its cooperation with Japan. It is on the premise of Kenya's commitment to TICAD that informed our decision to offer Nairobi as the host city for the TICAD VI Summit next year. The honor of hosting this very important

forum is a clear recognition that Kenya — and Africa in general — is ripe for mutually profitable partnerships with Japan.

As many are aware, this will be the first time that a TICAD summit will be held outside Japan, and most importantly in Africa, since its inception in 1993. The event comes at an opportune moment when Japan's engagement with Africa is witnessing an upward trend following the successful conclusion of the TICAD V Summit that was held in June 2013 in Yokohama, under the theme "Hand in Hand with a More Dynamic Africa."

Holding the TICAD VI Summit in Africa therefore serves to reaffirm TICAD's principle of African-owned development initiatives and genuine global partnership upon which the TICAD Process was founded. Like all African countries, Kenya believes that the initiative will give the continent's ordinary citizens the opportunity to get a sense of ownership of the TICAD process and appreciate its significance in contributing to Africa's growth.

While recognizing the government-to-government engagements in pursuit of realizing a successful summit and strengthened bilateral relations, I wish to challenge private sector stakeholders to seize this opportunity to learn more about Kenya and Africa, and establish and strengthen



President of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta (left) and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe meet in Tokyo on March 13. EMBASSY OF KENYA

relations with their counterparts in Africa for mutually profitable engagements.

For its part, Kenya has positioned itself as a preferred investment destination in Eastern Africa. This is well demonstrated through economic reforms that promote foreign investment, development of functional institutions, human resource development and enhanced regional integrations. Most importantly, Kenya is committed to lowering the cost of doing business through extensive business regulatory reforms.

Milestone achievements evidenced in modernizing railways, seaports, airports and the development of geothermal power stations have put Kenya on an accelerated developmental pedestal. This is further complemented by Kenya being a member of both the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) economic regional blocs, with a combined market of over 400 million people.

Indeed, Kenya's position as the economic, commercial and logistical hub in eastern central Africa, make the country one of the best investment destinations globally. Foreign direct investment has been on the rise and is the strongest in East Africa. Additionally, the rebased GDP figures of \$58.1 billion in 2014 elevated Kenya to a lower-middle-income country, one of the largest economies in sub-Saharan Africa and among the

fastest growing in the world. In the region, Kenya is the dominant economy in the EAC, contributing more than 40 percent of the region's GDP.

On the tourism front, I am pleased to highlight that Japanese tourists represent a very special niche of market for Kenya as a tourism destination by virtue of their value-oriented consumption and insights to learn from travel. It is in this regard, that the Japanese market has been earmarked as one of the potential sources to contribute to Kenya's goal of becoming one of the top long-haul tourist destinations in the world, offering high-end, diverse and distinctive visitor experiences. In pursuing this goal, the embassy is closely working with the Kenya Tourism Board on measures to increase Kenya's visibility within the Japanese market and address other pertinent issues that are of particular concern to Japanese travelers. We therefore encourage continued collaboration with tourism stakeholders on promoting Kenya's distinctive products and increase Japanese travel to Kenya.

Finally, the embassy wishes to sincerely thank all partners who have supported us to host the National Day reception this year. We wish readers of The Japan Times a happy festive season and good health and prosperity in the New Year. For more information about Kenya, visit our website at www.kenyarep-jp.com.



A business and diplomatic hub of Eastern and Central Africa, Nairobi will host the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) in 2016. EMBASSY OF KENYA



Expansion of the Port of Mombasa is one of the flagship projects under Kenya's "Vision 2030" development blueprint. JICA

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from the president and staff of
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