

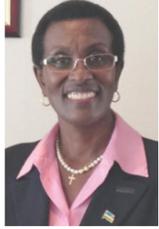
# Rwanda National Day

## Country sees a remarkable turnaround

Venetia Sebudandi  
AMBASSADOR OF RWANDA

July 1, 1962, marks the day when Rwanda gained its political independence from Belgian colonial rule. The pre-independence period of colonial rule was characterized by exploitative divisive politics, while the post-independence period was marked by extremist administrations that ruled by political exclusion, hatred and sectarianism. The consequences of these divisive politics resulted in the 1994 genocide, one of humanity's most brutal and swift genocides. The Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), under the leadership of H.E. President Paul Kagame, ended the genocide against the Tutsis on July 4, 1994, liberated the country from the genocidal forces and established peace and stability throughout the country, paving the way for social and economic reconstruction.

As we mark the 54th Anniversary of Rwanda's Independence



while at the same time celebrating the 22nd Anniversary of the Liberation of Rwanda from genocidal forces, it gives me great honor and privilege to convey to Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial family, the government and the people of Japan the warmest greetings from the government and people of Rwanda

I also wish to take this opportunity to commend H.E. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, for his constant commitment to the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) as he prepares to renew his commitment by visiting Africa for the second time, to preside over TICAD VI that will take place in Nairobi next month. This is a demonstration of his personal, as well as his administration's, commitment to Africa's prosperity, a welcome development.

Rwandans are using this occasion to reflect on Rwanda's journey from the tragedy of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, a story of triumph of hope over despair, but more importantly, a story of the resilience of the people, their discipline, their dreams, their hopes, aspirations and their optimism.

Rwanda has made good progress over the last two decades since the enormous challenges faced in the aftermath of a genocide that destroyed the entire socioeconomic fabric of the country. Rwandans have benefited from rapid economic growth, reduced poverty, better equality and increased access to services, including health and education. This has been possible only through the resilience of the people of Rwanda under the visionary leadership of the president, the government and the support of international partners and friends of Rwanda.

To achieve this progress, Rwanda set long-term development goals defined in its "Vision 2020," which is the country's long-term development strategy. The strategy seeks to transform the country from a low-income, agriculture-based economy to a knowledge-based, service-oriented economy, achieving middle-income status by 2020. These goals, which were built on remarkable development successes over the last decade, include high growth, rapid poverty reduction and reduced inequality. Between 2001 and 2015 real GDP growth averaged about 8 percent

per year and one of the sectors that contributed to this growth was tourism. These achievements were possible due to very ambitious and wide-ranging reforms, including the creation of a One Stop Centre at the Rwanda Development Board to facilitate doing business in Rwanda with the overall vision of transforming Rwanda into a dynamic global hub for business, investment and innovation. Local and foreign direct investment has been substantial, leading to prospects of growth, development and diversification through private sector participation in areas such as agriculture, information communications technology (ICT), manufacturing and services, particularly those in the finance and banking sector.

More focus has been put on tourism in Rwanda, which is well known for its mountain gorillas. Rwanda's gorillas have been featured in numerous documentaries and several world-famous personalities have participated in the annual gorilla naming ceremony.

Rwanda is one of the only two countries in the world where mountain gorillas can be visited safely at the moment. The num-



Newly completed Kigali Convention Center EMBASSY OF RWANDA

ber of people visiting Volcanoes National Park to see gorillas has significantly increased and Rwanda has also seen gorilla tourism as a valuable conservation tool, enforcing strict rules for the habituation and trekking of gorilla families. Tourists are willing to pay high fees for a limited number of permits, which are usually sold out. The revenue from gorilla tourism provide funds to the national parks and facilitate conservation activities. Additionally, five percent of park revenues are disbursed for community projects. Rwanda has focused on high-end tourism while maintaining conservation and contributing to poverty reduction through the involvement of communities as priorities.

There is, however, more to tourism in Rwanda than gorillas. Besides the Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda has two other national parks that offer a range of wildlife and biodiversity. Akagera National Park offers diverse animals such as lions, elephants, hippos, giraffes, zebras and more. The Nyungwe Forest National Park is rich in biodiversity and has a large tract of mountain forest where visitors can enjoy guided walks and chimpanzee tracking. Lake Kivu has recreational facilities as well, but there is still significant potential that could be developed. Furthermore, the country has been particularly successful through its ambitious MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing and Exhibitions) strategy in attracting

large numbers of business and conference travelers, mainly from the Great Lakes and East African Regions. This is evidenced by the large increase in the number of hotel rooms and the newly completed convention center.

In terms of export revenues, Rwanda's specialty coffee has been a leading export commodity, even being exported to Japan, but tourism has already outperformed coffee and tea by a wide margin.

There are several aspects that have contributed to the successful revival of tourism in Rwanda. First and foremost, the government has shown a clear commitment to the development of the tourism sector and has established itself as a safe destination in the region. Furthermore, the government involved the private sector from the start and has implemented a good strategy to market Rwanda as a tourism destination. The business environment has improved markedly, promoting private sector involvement. In addition, Rwanda has always seen tourism as an instrument to reduce poverty, for example, by directly involving local communities.

With TICAD VI taking place in for the first time in Africa next month, it is expected to contribute in a sustainable manner to

economic diversification of African countries by helping to accelerate the growth of industries, including tourism. Rwanda is looking forward to engaging the Japanese government and private sector to forge the required partnership that will promote enterprises not only in this area of tourism, but also in other areas to be addressed at TICAD VI. Our embassy will also continue to mobilize the Japanese private sector to be part of this partnership by organizing Rwanda-focused business and investment seminars around Japan, where Rwanda's remarkable business environment and untapped investment opportunities in different areas will be showcased.

We would also like 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 our continued partnership.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to various institutions, companies and individuals in Japan for their support and business engagement in Rwanda, particularly the management of Toyota Tsusho, Zensho Holdings and African Home Touch for sponsoring the publication of this article.

## Congratulations

to the People of the Republic of Rwanda on the 54th Anniversary of Independence and 22nd Anniversary of the Liberation Day

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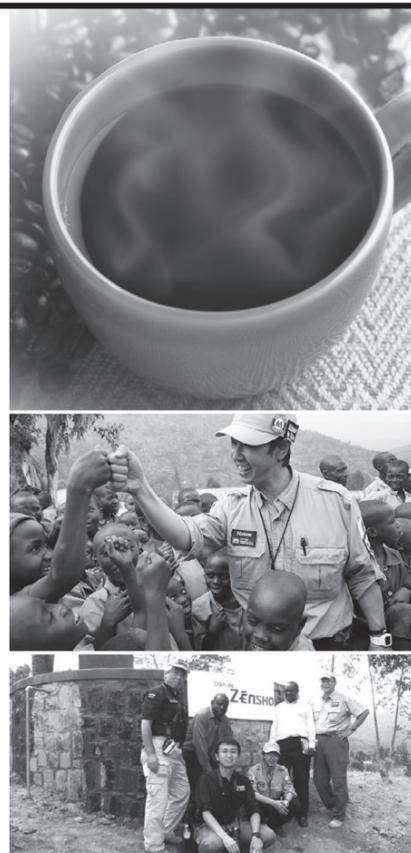
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