

Hoping for closer ties, deeper economic bonds



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Jan. 1 is a double celebration for the Republic of Haiti. Firstly, it is the anniversary of the Independence of Haiti, the first black republic in the world.

On this special day, we remember our independence heroes, Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henry Christophe, Alexandre Petion, Capois-la-Mort and others, who left us this land of freedom in legacy on Jan. 1, 1804, that is considered to be the starting point of the anti-slavery and self-determination movement.

From the outset, our founding fathers charted a course for us in foreign policy,

namely one of humanism and multilateralism. Petion, the second Haitian head of state did not hesitate to supply Simon Bolivar with the arms, ammunition and men needed to liberate regions in South America. When asked by Bolivar what was to be given in return, he replied, "Freedom for slaves wherever he defeated his adversaries." Today, Haiti is a member of many regional and international organizations.

To all Haitians, in Haiti or elsewhere, and particularly to those who have made Japan their place of residence, we wish them a happy independence day.

The second celebration is New Year's Day. I would like, on behalf of the government and people of Haiti, to present my best wishes for health, peace and prosperity to the government and people of Japan, and to Haitian nationals living here.

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude to the Japanese people and government for their great compassion and unfailing support. In fact, Japan stands in friendship with Haiti in providing support for our social and economic development. In difficult times, notably during the earthquake on Jan. 12, 2010, and during Hurricane Matthew last October, Japan has been always among the first to support Haiti.

As this new year dawns, our sincerest wish for Haiti-Japan relations is that both countries establish closer relations and deepen economic and commercial ties. There are enormous opportunities in both countries; it is only a question of identifying them, having vision and exploiting them.

For the next 10 years, Haiti is a country that will need to be built and rebuilt, but built better by respecting anti-seismic and hurricane standards. The great loss of

human life during natural disasters concerns all Haitians. Over 250,000 lives were lost during the 2010 earthquake and more recently, last October, over 500 deaths were recorded in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew. Japan's broad expertise in natural disaster management and mitigation is recognized worldwide. Japanese engineers and construction companies could make a tremendous contribution to the rebuilding of Haiti.

The areas of comparative advantage of Haiti vis-a-vis Japan are in the assembly industry and in certain agricultural products such as gourmet coffee and cocoa from high-altitude, microclimate zones. The Haitian Embassy in Japan is open to discussions with those interested in importing from or investing in Haiti.

Finally, we would like to say: "Long live Haiti, long live Japan and long live Haiti-Japan relations!"