

# Gabon independence day

## 2009: a year of challenges and hope for Gabon

Jean-Christian Obame  
AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY  
AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF GABON  
TO JAPAN

On Aug. 17, we celebrate the 49th anniversary of Gabon as a sovereign country. On this auspicious occasion, it gives me again great pleasure to address the readers of The Japan Times and convey, on behalf of the interim president of the Gabonese Republic, H.E. Rose Francine Rogombe, members of the transitional government and the Gabonese people, our best wishes for peace, good health and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as to the rest of the Imperial household. We also wish to extend our warm greetings to the Japanese authorities and the friendly people of Japan.

Similarly, our heartfelt greetings go to the small community of fellow Gabonese citizens, namely, students in Japan, as well as to the officials and many friends of Gabon in Indonesia and Malaysia, countries that belong to our diplomatic constituency.

**Developments, prospects**  
Since my last message in The Japan Times and particularly since the first half of this year, Gabon has gone through a difficult and challenging period with the sudden loss of the presidential couple. On March 14, first lady Edith Lucie Bongo Ondimba passed away in Morocco, followed less than three months later, on June 8, by the death of H.E. El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba in a Spanish hospital, where he

was receiving treatment. These unexpected circumstances not only put Gabon in the spotlight but also created challenges for a country that had experienced more than four decades of peace and stability under the leadership of President Bongo.

The first challenge is the transitional political period up to the next presidential election. Based on the Gabon Constitution, the vacancy of power was filled by the president of the Senate, Rose Francine Rogombe, who was sworn in June 9 to succeed President Bongo. Her main task in taking over was to organize the presidential election within 45 days and the political forces in Gabon have agreed that it should be held Aug. 30. Twenty-three candidates, including for the first time three female candidates, will be competing for the highest post. The political campaign for the presidential election, in which Gabonese voters, including those in Japan, will participate, started Aug. 15 for a two-week period.

According to the National Electoral Commission in charge of organizing the election, all technical requirements have been fulfilled to ensure a free, fair and transparent election, which naturally international observers and friends of Gabon are cordially invited to monitor. The hope of all Gabonese is that this presidential election will be a peaceful one and consolidate the democratic process in Gabon.

The second challenge is to cope with the aftermath of the presidential election, and the need to implement an economic and social program, which has raised very high expectations from the population. Indeed, the next president would have to set priori-

ties in various sectors already identified.

Within the context of the ongoing global economic and financial crisis, boosting economic growth will remain at the top of the list of those priorities. In this regard, most of the presidential candidates have announced that they will put emphasis on revitalizing areas such as agriculture for improving food security and limiting food imports, timber processing for inducing more value added, oil, gas and gas processing in-

line with the economic development requirements of the nation.

The third challenge is for Gabon to take advantage of its exceptional flora and fauna. By devoting 11 percent of its territory to the creation of national parks, Gabon has not only decided to forcefully implement a national strategy for environmental conservation but also is generously willing to share with the rest of humanity the richness of its biodiversity. As such, Lope National Park, which is

**For about four decades, Gabon and Japan have managed to forge a successful friendship and partnership. The strength of their bonds lies in mutual respect, and a shared vision of international issues, including economic cooperation, peace, human rights and the environment. Indeed, there are many assets for establishing a solid partnership with Gabon.**

industries, and above all, infrastructure projects, which are considered to be the key elements for boosting private sector-led economic growth, promoting services, expanding small and medium-size enterprises, creating employment and reducing poverty among others.

It should be recalled that Gabon needs all kind of infrastructure, including in particular paved and feeder roads across the country, as well as technologies in renewable energy and ICTs for positioning Gabon as a financial hub in Central Africa. Education and health are also at the top of the list of priorities being envisaged by most of the candidates. These two sectors require new vision, investment and partnership to make them more

a UNESCO World Heritage site, along with other parks and protected areas are truly making Gabon the "Mecca of Nature" for ecotourism.

As a reminder, let me recall here that Gabon is covered with a well-preserved equatorial forest belonging to the well-known Congo Basin and bordered by more than 850 km of coasts along the Atlantic Ocean. This land has for centuries been heaven for a diversified fauna, including more than a thousand bird species, the famous round-eared Assala elephants, tree gorillas, chimpanzees, various monkeys, crocodiles, sea turtles, abundant fish and even whales. The flora is equally rich, with, for instance, more than 400 different species of trees and various types of naturally grown

orchids.

For all these, Gabon needs to be a destination on the maps of Japanese tourists. The next JATA World Fair in September 2009 in Tokyo will provide us with an opportunity to promote ecotourism in Gabon. The poster below shows the main tourist attractions in Gabon. For more information, please contact us and visit our Web site: [www.Gabonembassy-tokyo.org](http://www.Gabonembassy-tokyo.org)

**Cooperation with Japan**  
For about four decades, Gabon and Japan have managed to forge a successful friendship and partnership. The strength of their bonds lies in mutual respect and a shared vision of international issues, including economic cooperation, peace, human rights and the environment.

Indeed, there are many assets for establishing a solid partnership with Gabon: first, a stable political and democratic environment created over years; and second, investment opportunities in several sectors, including mining, oil, gas, timber and ecotourism. Again, it should be recalled that Gabon since 2002 has launched 13 national parks aimed at preserving and protecting the very rare natural heritage of our planet. This is a legacy from the late President Bongo, which needs to be pursued.

In the area of trade and investment, relationships have over the years shown a growing trend, thus confirming their complementary aspects and mutual interests on both sides. As a reminder, Gabon's exports to Japan include crude oil, manganese, timber and fish while Japanese exports to Gabon include generally cars, electronics and heavy equipment.

Strengthening the partnership through foreign direct investment from Japan to Gabon could increase trade further. In that context, companies such as Mitsubishi Pe-



Official welcome: Interim President of Gabon H.E. Rose Francine Rogombe (third from left), Japan's Ambassador to Gabon H.E. Motoi Kato (second from left) and Gabon's Ambassador to Japan H.E. Jean-Christian Obame (second from right) pose with JICA Young Volunteers at a ceremony at the presidential office in the Gabon capital Libreville on July 27.

roleum Development Corp., which has established a representative branch in Gabon, is engaged on a larger scale in oil exploration and development. Another company, ERAMET-Japan, is intensifying its manganese activities in Gabon with the upcoming investment in a metallurgy processing plant that will create employment and more value added in the mining sector. Finally, it should be also recalled that most Japanese carmakers are well represented in Gabon as well as companies such as Komatsu for heavy equipment.

In the area of cultural exchanges, Gabon highly values the ongoing technical cooperation with Japanese government agencies, namely, JICA and the Overseas Fisheries Cooperation Foundation. The Gabonese authorities would like to stress once again that this exemplary cooperation, which is producing tangible results in main-

taining and building fishing centers in Gabon, should be expanded to other vital sectors such as education, health and the environment. In these, it should be recalled that Gabon benefits from the JICA's Young Volunteers Program. Currently, 24 volunteers work in Gabon in various fields such as health care, education, fisheries and the environment. Also, last year in Libreville on the occasion of the TICAD IV Ministerial

Preparatory Meeting, a "Technical Cooperation Agreement" was signed by our two countries. This agreement is expected to expand the partnership between Gabon and Japan through the JICA's Senior Volunteers Program, particularly in the areas of training, design, and implementing development projects in vital sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture and the environment.

## Foundations in place for continued growth, progress

Seiken Sugiura  
SECRETARY GENERAL, JAPAN-AFRICAN  
UNION PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP  
LEAGUE, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE  
FOR GABON

As secretary general of the Japan-African Union Parliamentary Friendship League and chairman of the Subcommittee for Gabon, I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations on the 49th National Day of Gabon.



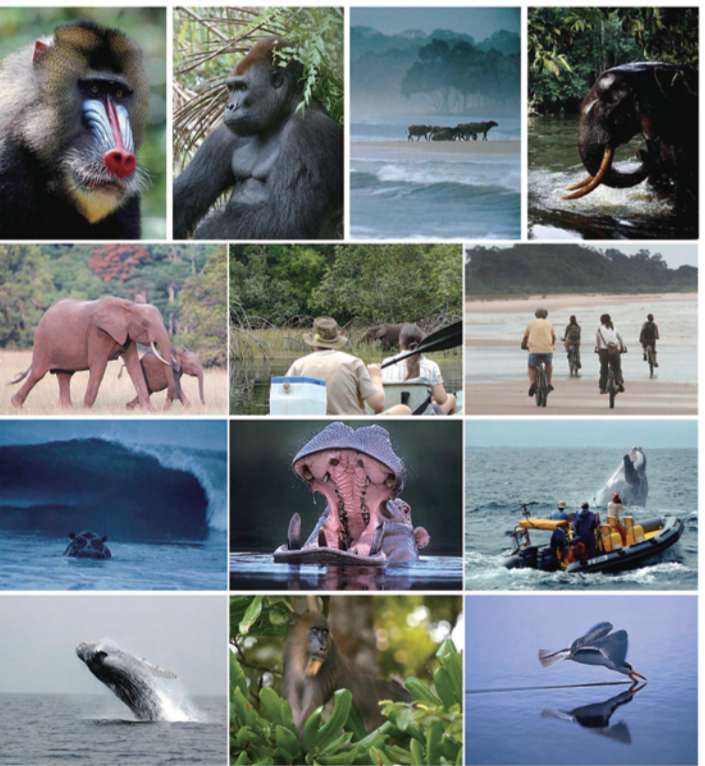
Under the matchless leadership of late President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba and with the efforts of its people, Gabon has continued developing without war or conflict since its independence. Recalling my visit to Gabon in 2006, when I was minister of justice, I clearly remember the magnificent nature, the kindness of the people and the candid exchange of views I had with President Bongo. This is why the loss of the president is all the more sorrowful to me. On July 16, I attended his state funeral as a special envoy, and today I would like to repeat my sincere condolences to the nation and the people of Gabon.

Anticipating the successful presidential election Aug. 30, and expecting the people's power to drive the country's development, I again pledge myself to contribute toward the further strengthened relations between Japan and Gabon.

**Congratulations**  
to the People of the Republic of Gabon  
on the Occasion of the 49th Anniversary  
of Their Independence Day

JAPAN TUNA FISHERIES  
CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION  
31-1 Eitai 2-chome, Koto-ku, Tokyo

## GABON EARTH'S LAST EDEN



**Invest in Gabon**  
Opportunities in:  
Wood Processing, Oil and Gas, Mining,  
Infrastructure, Fishing and Agriculture...

OKOUME LOGS	MINISTRY OF FORESTRY	WOOD PROCESSING
OIL PLATFORM	MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM	GAS PLATFORM
MANGANESE	PRECIOUS METAL	MANGANESE MINE
ROAD BUILDING	ROAD PROJECTS	PORT PROJECTS

## Gabon a leading player in African development

Tadahiko Ito  
FORMER MEMBER OF THE HOUSE  
OF REPRESENTATIVES

I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to the people of Gabon on the 49th anniversary of the republic's independence.



After the recent and sudden loss of President Omar Bongo, the father of Gabon's independence, it is a real sadness that he cannot celebrate this memorial day with his big family once more. I believe, however, that the late president will be watching over his nation, which will prosper in the 21st century, the time of Africa's genuine devel-

opment. Indeed, I am not able to fully express my feelings of celebration to the Republic of Gabon, endowed with energy resources and virgin nature, which are Gabon's heritage and challenge, and are going to be the country's assets in the international community. With regard to the relations with my country, what I hope for most is a better air-line connection between Japan and Gabon, and a freer, more active exchange of people, materials, information, etc.

The future of our two countries rests on the shoulders of their people. I sincerely count on the efforts of as many actors as there may be, from Motoi Kato, ambassador of Japan to Gabon, on down.

**Congratulations**  
to the People of the Republic of Gabon  
on the Occasion of the 49th Anniversary of  
Their Independence Day

**MPDC GABON CO., LTD.**

a subsidiary of Mitsubishi Corporation

Head Office:  
2-3-1, Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0005, Japan  
Tel: (03) 3210-3133 Fax: (03) 3210-5076

**COMILOG**  
The Manganese Source®

**Congratulations**  
to the Republic of Gabon  
on the Occasion of the 49th Anniversary of  
Their Independence Day

ERAMET INTERNATIONAL TOKYO BRANCH  
JIMBOCHO NK BLDG. 9F, 2-7, KANDA JIMBOCHO,  
CHIYODA-KU, TOKYO 101-0051, JAPAN  
TEL: (81-3) 3265-3931