

Ghana independence day

United, common vision leads to prosperity

Kwame Tenkorang
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA

Today marks the 53rd anniversary of Ghana's independence. On March 6, 1957, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African nation to attain independence, a phenomenal development that later ushered in the period of the birth of nations on our continent. The celebration of our National Day this year happily coincides with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Embassy of Ghana in Tokyo.



Today also marks a very special day in the continuing excellent relations between Ghana and Japan, as His Royal Highness the Crown Prince Naruhito enplanes for a groundbreaking royal visit to

Ghana and Kenya. We wish His Royal Highness a safe trip to Ghana and wish to assure His Highness and the people of Japan that a warm welcome to Ghana is assured. We promise His Royal Highness a taste of the proverbial warm Ghanaian hospitality and the world-renowned friendliness of the Ghanaian people.

On this momentous occasion, it gives me great honor and privilege to convey heartfelt greetings and deepest respect on behalf of the government and people of Ghana to Their Imperial Majesties, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the entire Imperial Family as well as to the government and friendly people of Japan. May I also seize this unique opportunity to convey warm congratulations and sincere best wishes from the government and people of Ghana to His Majesty Emperor Akihito on the occasion of



President of the Republic of Ghana John Evans Atta Mills

the 20th anniversary of His Majesty's accession to the throne.

The 6th of March is the day Ghanaians the world over gather around to celebrate the uniqueness of our land, reflect on the legacies that our forebears bequeathed to us and rededicate ourselves to leaving a solid legacy for the genera-

tions after us.

As Ghana commemorates this historic day, it is imperative that we appreciate the sociopolitical and economic challenges that the country has been through over the past 53 years of nationhood. These challenges notwithstanding, national events over the last 18 years have amply demonstrated the determination and steadfastness of Ghanaians to chart a new path of prosperity for themselves.

Ghana made a historic transition to multiparty democracy in 1992, and has since conducted five successive free and fair democratic elections that witnessed the peaceful transfer of power from one constitutionally elected government to another. The last of these elections, held in December 2008, which ushered in the new government of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) under the leadership of professor John Evans Atta Mills, marked yet another defining moment in the nation's journey toward consolidating her fledgling democracy. Today, the country's democratic space continues to widen, underpinned by Rule of Law, respect for Fundamental Human Rights, Freedom of the Press and Association, an independent Judiciary and a vibrant Legislature.

The policy agenda of the Ghana government, as enunciated by President Mills on his assumption of office, include, investment in people, job creation, development of infrastructure and the pursuit of an open, transparent and accountable government. In the pursuit of social justice, the ruling government has pledged to lay a firm foundation for a prosperous and better Ghana based on a consensus-driven agenda where the contributions of every citizen would be deemed critical. The

government envisions a nation whose future prosperity is anchored on a united and common vision of the citizenry.

Amid the daunting development challenges, both domestic and external, that had confronted and continue to face the new administration, it is worthy to note that significant progress has been made in all areas of governance at the end of its first year in power. Ghana, like most African countries, has not escaped the impact of the global economic downturn. Consequently, credit lines froze, trade finance diminished, foreign direct investment slowed down and remittances from overseas workers dwindled significantly. To minimize the effects of the financial crisis and work toward resuscitating the economy, the government implemented a series of human-centered policies that have begun yielding dividends. The National Youth Employment Program (NYEP), aimed at harnessing the extraordinary talent of youths, is opening up employment generation avenues in critical sectors such as agriculture. Furthermore, through the active support of the government, local industries are expanding their range of activities.

The government remains committed to facilitating the creation of a business environment that balances the resuscitation and growth of local industries with the operation of foreign business considered vital to the creation of a robust national economy. In this regard, encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit of the private



Leader: Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (1909-72) was the first president of Ghana and an influential 20th-century advocate of Pan-Africanism. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA

sector and adding value to exported products remain a critical focal area for the government. At the same time, to foster industrial harmony, negotiations are ongoing between the government and organized labor toward an improved welfare scheme and realistic wages for workers.

Considerable progress has also been made in such critical areas as education, health delivery and agriculture as well as growth-promoting infra-

structure investment. With specific reference to the agricultural sector, which engages about 70 percent of Ghana's labor force, the government has underlined its commitment to modernize the sector. Investment across the agricultural value chain with the view to attaining self-sufficiency in food production in the long run remains a central focus of the government.

While all these initiatives would by no means contribute eventually toward the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the broad economic vision of Ghana is to progress into middle-income status over the next decade. However, the choices that Ghana has to make on the way to this goal, against the backdrop of the challenges of globalization, can only be successful with the continuing support of our development partners and friendly coun-

tries such as Japan.

The commemoration of this auspicious occasion presents a unique opportunity to acknowledge, once more, with deep gratitude, the immense assistance extended to the government and people of Ghana by Japan over the years. The foundation of the historical ties that bind our two countries and peoples was laid by Dr. Hideyo Noguchi, an illustrious son of Japan who went to Ghana in the late 1920's to conduct medical research into yellow fever. Formal diplomatic relations between Ghana and Japan, which were forged in the period immediately following Ghana's independence, have witnessed phenomenal growth with expansion incorporating new areas of cooperation to the mutual benefit of the two countries. These warm relations have over the past decade



Freedom: In the capital Accra, Black Star Square (or Independence Square) celebrates the fact that Ghana was the first African nation south of the Sahara to gain independence.

Congratulations to the People of the Republic of Ghana on the 53rd Anniversary of Their Independence Day

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Lofty heights: The undisturbed rain forest of Kakum National Park, situated 170 km from Accra, is a delightful place for bird watchers, botanists and eco-tourists.

Bright future in Ghana

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

been characterized by the exchange of high-level visits.

Japanese Official Development Assistance has contributed in no small measure toward complementing the national development efforts of Ghana. Critical sectors of the Ghanaian economy, including agriculture, health, education and infrastructure have all benefited from Japanese support. Initiatives launched by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) are impacting positively on the lives of Ghanaians in a variety of ways. The Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD), the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), capacity building programs and related rural development projects are but only a few of JICA's interventions. Equally worthy of recognition is the invaluable contribution of the Japanese youth dispatched annually to Ghana for volunteer service, whose passion and selfless devotion to duty in Ghana have brought the peoples of the two friendly countries much closer. We remain convinced that Ghana can continue to count on the unfailing support of Japan in the years ahead to partner her in achieving our national development aspirations.

On the global scene, the common values and aspirations shared by Ghana and Japan provide the platform for the two countries to enjoy excellent cooperation and mutual support on many initiatives at various multilateral forums. Intensified collaboration between Ghana and Japan is needed, more than ever, to deal with the emerging formidable challenges that confront our world today.

Japan's engagement with Africa, particularly within the framework of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) is laudable. The outcomes of the TICAD IV Summit in 2008, including the adoption of the Yokohama Action Plan, which focuses attention on the priority issues of accelerating the pace of economic growth and development in Africa, clearly demonstrate Japan's renewed interest to expand the scope of cooperation with the continent. The commemoration of this historic day comes against the backdrop of the visit to Africa by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Naruhito. This welcome development gives additional boost to Japan's desire to deepen her partnership with Africa.

The presence in Ghana of His

Royal Highness the Crown Prince reinforces the warm, cordial and friendly relations between Ghana and Japan and bears testimony to the growing confidence that Japan has in Ghana's leadership and the country's nascent democracy. The momentum that this high-level visit is expected to generate should spur the peoples of Ghana and Japan to continue to work assiduously to lift their relations to a higher pedestal. In this endeavor, the organized private sector has a crucial role to play in deepening the commercial dimension of our relations. Ghana believes that foreign direct investment (FDI) remains the catalyst for accelerated economic development. To this end, a special invitation is being extended to Japanese business and industry to invest in very promising sectors of the Ghanaian economy where good returns on investment are guaranteed. These sectors include agriculture and agro-processing, manufacturing, eco-tourism, mining and the services sector. The recently discovered offshore oil fields in Ghana, which will begin pumping oil in the last quarter of this year, should serve as good news for companies desirous of investing in the energy industry, namely the oil, gas and related upstream sector.

The reasons for choosing Ghana as an investment destination in Africa are obvious — a stable democratic political system, human capital, a responsive legal system, improved telecommunications and infrastructural facilities all provide a viable environment for doing business. Other major attractions are the highly competitive incentives for investors and Ghana's positive economic indicators such as declining inflation, lower lending interest rates and an efficient financial services sector.

While extending fraternal greetings to all my compatriots in Japan on our anniversary, my special appeal is to let us use the occasion to reflect on the way forward as we strive collectively to build a better and prosperous Ghana anchored on a united and common vision.

I take this opportunity to renew our heartfelt gratitude to the government and friendly people of Japan for contributing to another successful year for Ghana. My sincere thanks also go to The Japan Times for allowing me to address its faithful readership through this medium, with the generous support of friends of Ghana.

We look forward to working toward increased collaboration between Japan and Ghana for the mutual benefit of our two countries and peoples.

Long live Ghana-Japan relations.



Key crop: Ghana is the second-largest bulk producer of cacao in the world, with an average annual production of over 700,000 tons.