

Nigeria independence day

Most populous African nation celebrates golden year

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the independence of Nigeria, the Ambassador of Nigeria to Japan Godwin Nsude Agbo talked to The Japan Times at his office in the embassy in Tokyo.



Ambassador of Nigeria to Japan Godwin Nsude Agbo

You assumed your duties in Japan about two years ago. How has it been, taking into consideration the divergence in cultures, languages, etc.? Has your experience been pleasant?

It has been a wonderful and pleasant experience even though there are divergences in language and culture. My experience since assumption here as ambassador has been quite very interesting.

Before my arrival, I have always known Japan to be a developed country but what I found on the ground when I arrived about two years ago surpassed my imagination. The infrastructures are very solid and perhaps second to none in the world. In order to overcome the language barrier, I had to enroll in a Japanese language course. Though I am not yet very fluent in the language, I can however converse reasonably well. I also relish many Japanese foods.

What would you say is the present state of relations between Nigeria and Japan?

Nigeria and Japan have been having cordial and wonderful bilateral relations. You may want to know that Japan was among the first set of countries where we opened diplomatic missions after gaining independence in 1960.

Since then trade and commercial links have flourished and grown tremendously between the two countries, though I must confess that there was a lull in relations during the military era but things have since changed and relations have improved

tremendously since the advent of democracy in 1999.

You may also want to know that Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Umaru Yar'Adua visited Japan in the past. Even the current Nigerian president also visited Japan during the TICAD IV meeting in 2008, though as vice president. I am sure that you would remember that Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori also visited Nigeria. Of course, all these visits are in addition to the many visits between the senior government officials of both countries. Later this month our finance minister will be leading a delegation of senior Nigerian customs officials to Japan to meet with their counterparts.

Japan is equally assisting us in our developmental efforts, particularly in the areas of education, energy, agriculture, mining, health and social services. Japanese companies like Marubeni, Sojitz, Yamaha and Ajinomoto have large presences in Nigeria.

Nigeria has the largest



Anniversary: Official banner celebrating 50 years of independence in Nigeria EMBASSY OF NIGERIA

market in Africa and there are great investment opportunities for which other Japanese companies could take advantage of, particularly in the oil and gas, mining and manufacturing sectors.

As Nigeria marks the 50th anniversary of its independence on Oct. 1, what have been the challenges facing Nigeria as a nation and what has been done to overcome them?

Just like any other nation, Nigeria since independence 50 years ago has faced the challenges of nationhood. You would agree with me that Nigeria is a very unique country. We have three major ethnic groups and very many minority groups, perhaps more than 250. To aggregate the political interests of these groups has really posed a great challenge for the leadership in the country.

Nigeria is also very vast in terms of size and it is also the most populous country in Africa, with a population of more than 140 million. To provide societal services and infrastructure for this teeming population has also posed a challenge in its own way.

In Nigeria, and for a long time, our democratic experience was cut short because of incessant military intervention. This has really narrowed the political space and eliminated national discourse on issues that were of national importance. In effect, the long military rule in Nigeria also posed a challenge to national development.

By and large, the fact that Nigeria today is still an indivisible entity in spite of some of the challenges we have faced as a nation, some of which I have mentioned, and in spite of the civil war we fought in the late '60s, is a clear testimony of our determination to build a truly egalitarian society where justice and truth shall reign.

I must, however, confess that the task of building a united Nigeria has now become easier because of our all-inclusive democratic experience since 1999. Successive civilian governments have done much to provide the necessary infrastructure and also to make the country an investment destination.

There are some Japanese businessmen in Nigeria. In what areas or sectors are they operating?

As mentioned earlier, a lot of Japanese businessmen travel to Nigeria to explore business opportunities. As of today we have some Japanese presence in Nigeria though we would have preferred the number to increase more than what it is presently. To answer your question directly, Japanese companies are operating in the areas of energy, mining, agriculture, assembling, trading, and education, among others.

How would you evaluate TICAD in the developmental process of Nigeria?

The whole idea of the TICAD process has been a won-

derful one by the Japanese government. It is a response by the Japanese government to the development challenges faced by Africa. We appreciate it more considering that Japan never colonized any African country. So it is not a question of Japan paying reparation or anything to the African countries.

As an African country, we have felt the impact of the process in a number of ways. In the area of power generation, high powered generation lines have been constructed in the northern and southern parts of the country. In the area of agriculture, assistance has been offered in rice and yam cultivation, and under education, in the building of classrooms. Now an FM radio station has been set up in one of the eastern states. My government really appreciates all the assistance offered through the TICAD process and would want to use this medium to really thank the Japanese government. We hope that the full implementation of TICAD IV will continue to be given primacy by the Japanese government.

There is the thinking that many Nigerians in Japan are into some unlawful businesses. What do you have to say about this?

There is one thing we should recognize and that is that Nigerians are highly mobile people. I am not sure there is any country in the whole world where you would not find Nigerians. In Japan,

Nigeria has the largest population among the citizens of African countries. It is only natural that you would find among that number some that may be living on the fast lanes. Presently, there are about 10,000 Nigerians in Japan and of that number only about 60 have run foul of the law in terms of being incarcerated, detained or facing deportation.

As an embassy, however, we have always impressed on our citizens to be law abiding and I am sure you would agree with me that quite a sizeable number of Nigerians in Japan are in lawful businesses. A lot of them are in the export business. This is because Japanese products, particularly vehicle spare parts, generators and electronic equipment, are very popular in Nigeria. A number of them are also in clean entertainment business. I am sure you must have heard of Bobby, a Nigerian, who is well-appreciated in Japan.

Would you recommend some books, papers, magazines or websites available in English for readers to learn more about your country?

Of course, yes, but the first I want to recommend is the embassy's website, which is nigeriaembassy.jp. On the site, there are links to many Nigerian newspapers and magazines and also a lot of information on Nigeria both in English and Japanese. So I would advise readers to visit the website.



Legislature: The National Assembly building in the capital Abuja is a symbol of democracy in Nigeria. EMBASSY OF NIGERIA

What cultural events to introduce Nigerian art, music or sports are you planning in the near future?

Honestly, we have not done much as a single country in this regard. However, we have used other forums like the fiestas held in Yokohama and Hibiya to showcase our cuisine and arts and culture. Meanwhile, we have commenced arrangements to ensure that we have a cultural day where Nigerian residents in Japan will perform some cultural displays. Incidentally, for our 50th independence anniversary today, a cultural troupe will be performing. I hope you will be there.

What benefits come from enhancing mutual understanding between Nigeria and Japan?

Japan is an economic power and an important global player. You would recognize the importance of Japan by the number of diplomatic missions in the country. I doubt if there is any country in the world where the impact of Japan is not felt either in the use of Japanese cars or electronics. Japan has become a brand name in the world and for us in Nigeria there is quite a lot to gain from Japan. In effect, improving our mutual relations would be very beneficial to both countries in this world of globalization and interdependence. To this extent, there are quite a number of mechanisms that have been put in place to promote, enhance and improve cordial and warm relations between Nigeria and Japan.

Japan is ready to help Nigeria in developing infrastructure

Hidetoshi Nishimura
CHAIRMAN, JAPAN-NIGERIA
ASSOCIATION

On behalf of the Japan-Nigeria Association, I extend my congratulations to President Goodluck Jonathan and the people of Nigeria on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of their nation's independence.



Nigeria has shown to be resilient despite the world economy plunging into a recession following the financial crisis and it is to my great joy that the country has become a leader in the international arena among African countries through its spectacular economic growth. As the representative and member of Japanese companies that have relationships with Nigeria, I wish for its continued growth and would like to take this opportunity to present some of the issues Nigeria ought to address in order to further promote the entry of Japanese companies into Nigeria.

First, we ought to recognize infrastructure as a vital topic that must be addressed. While infrastructure will most likely be developed in the mid-

to long term in the country, public roads, seaports, and electricity are still at the implementation stage, which makes foreign investment into the country more costly.

Also, in regards to public safety, a steady trend toward recovery can be seen, but there are some areas where progress has been slow. I look forward to seeing this issue being tackled by the Nigerian government.

With true affection for the country and a genuine interest in establishing even warmer ties with Nigeria, I look forward to the aforementioned issues to be improved so that it will be easier for foreign companies to make inroads into the Nigerian market.

Under the firm leadership of President Jonathan, Nigeria is pushing forward toward further development. Though the Japan-Nigeria Association is an amalgam of Japanese public-sector companies, we will not hesitate in aiding the country in areas of need and as friends of Nigeria in Japan, it is our firm hope that Nigeria continues its progress.

I once again congratulate Nigeria for all of its achievements thus far and hope that Nigeria, as a country that will play a leading role in Africa, continues its path toward further development.

**Our Sincere Congratulations
to the People of
The Federal Republic of Nigeria
on the Occasion of
the 50th Anniversary of
Their Independence Day**

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