

Benin national day

Developing democracy in a rising economy

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On Aug. 1, the people of the Republic of Benin celebrate 51 years of their sovereignty in a context of achievements and important challenges. For those living in Japan particularly, it is also with gravity.



On this solemn occasion, let me convey, on behalf of my beloved country, of the Embassy of Benin and in communion with all Beninese residing in the Japanese archipelago, my profound gratitude to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial Family, H.E. Prime Minister Naoto Kan and his government, and to the people of Japan for their friendship, solidarity and support, and their hospitality.

As a matter of fact, during a one-year period, even if Benin is still a least developed country facing hard socioeconomic conditions due mainly to external factors, it remains the initiator of national conferences as peaceful means to solve political crises, promoting human rights and the rule of law, on the path of an economy rising in a peaceful democracy.

This year, Benin has successfully and peacefully conducted two major elections: its fifth presidential election, won by President Boni Yayi, and its sixth legislative elections since 1991. Now, the challenge is building a truly modern and sustainable economy. Through a narrow path, the country is trying painfully to find its way by itself. For that purpose, fortunately, international solidarity is helping with technical and financial assistance.

Considering Japan, a lot has been done during the last year. For instance, Japanese contributions have been delivered bilaterally or within the United Nations network to tackle the financial deficit for the realization of the computerized electoral permanent list (LEPI), which led to the elections mentioned above. Japan has made a significant effort to make concrete the U.N. Development Program's Millennium Villages project, which focuses on a few select countries with the aim of helping them realize the U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The people of Benin have particularly appreciated the equipment donation made by the government of Japan during the terrible flood of 2010. Meanwhile, action is ongoing in the traditional fields (health, water, education, infrastructure, etc.) of the bilat-

eral cooperation. The Beninese are also discovering Japanese television programs.

Taking into account the profound reforms engaged by the government of Benin, the strategic location of the country in West Africa, its economic potential and its human resources, I am confident that this cooperation will, without any doubt, be strengthened and broadened with many other actions — such as in the private sector, where tourism, agriculture, transport, infrastructure, housing, environment, science and technology, new technologies of information and communication, textiles, energy and climate change offer real opportunities and are indicated for partnership.

I encourage those on the Japanese private sector side already involved in that fruitful partnership, and I urge and invite the others to do so, as Benin is the main critical entry point in the whole region of West Africa, with its market of more than 250 million people more and more integrated every day.

Forever, I cannot forget what happened on March 11, 2011, in Japan. My staff and I, together with the members of our respective families and my compatriots residing in the Japanese archipelago, are very sensitive to the pain and suffering that have afflicted the brave and ad-

mirable people of Japan. We deeply consider the enormous cost in terms of trauma, human life, materials, infrastructure and equipment, human security and economic growth caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake followed by the huge and devastating tsunami, which led to the horrible Fukushima nuclear plant accident.

Once more, it is a great privilege for me to express, on behalf of the people of the Republic of Benin, a heartfelt compassion and solidarity to the great people of Japan. I am fully confident that the ingenious people of Japan will very quickly overcome the difficulties and reconstruct infrastructure and equipment to replace the damaged ones.

Finally, I would like to fulfill the pleasant duty to renew to Their Imperial Majesties, the government and the people of Japan the gratitude of the people of Benin, thankful for their various support to improve pluralist democracy and good governance in Benin and to achieve Benin's MDGs.

To all Beninese living in Japan and in other countries inside the jurisdiction of this embassy, I wish a happy National Day with solidarity with the people of Japan and I urge them to seize any opportunity to convey this solidarity to our hosts.