

Kingdom of Morocco throne day

Making progress at home as well as with Japan

Samir Arrour
AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

Today marks the 13th anniversary of the enthronement of His Majesty King Mohammed VI. On this auspicious occasion and as ambassador of His Majesty the King of Morocco to Japan, I would like to convey my respectful greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the members of the Imperial family, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, the government and the friendly people of Japan.



progress on the other hand. The kingdom, through the insightful vision of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, pledged, for over a decade, a raft of major changes, opening considerable political and economic development and social progress. Similarly, work on "advanced regionalization" has enabled the kingdom to build a new model of territorial governance and establish a new relationship between central and regional authorities.

The process of reforms that started with the reign of His Majesty King Mohammed VI in 1999 has matured and been enshrined in elaborating a democratic constitution. In fact, prior to the changes that occurred in the North African region during the first weeks of 2011, Morocco grasped the message voiced out by the youth and responded to it in a positive way. The March 9, 2011, speech of His Majesty the King, addressed to the nation, laid the ground for a comprehensive constitutional reform that would constitute later a remarkable and revolutionary step forward to respond positively to the calls for change.

In the national arena, the most important event was the national election held in November 2011 followed by the formation of the new government headed by H.E. Abdelilah Benkirane of the PJD (Justice and Development Party). The PJD, which was in the parliamentary opposition, secured a very comfortable number of the seats in the Parli-

Constitution, elections

Commemorating Morocco's National Day in Japan is an opportunity to share with the Japanese public and readers of The Japan Times the current political situation in Morocco and to overview the bilateral relations during this year with Japan.

Regarding the political process in Morocco, it may be useful to note that starting from its independence in 1956, the Kingdom of Morocco has opted for the establishment of a democratic state based on good governance, the guarantee of individual freedom and dignity of its citizens, the respect for human rights, while upholding the principles of equality and equal opportunities, social justice, as well as the fight against marginalization and social exclusion.

Morocco is continuing its effort to reconcile economic and social reforms on the one hand and political and democratic



H.M. King Mohammed VI

ment. H.E. Benkirane invited three other political parties to join him and formed a coalition government.

The new head of the government indicates his determination to continue the program of reforms started two decades ago and he has engaged to fight corruption, promote economic development and social justice.

On its international and regional relations, Morocco works to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood, cooperation, solidarity and constructive partnership with its international partners. Within its natural Arab Islamic and African neighborhood, the government of His Majesty the King has taken various steps to further strengthen its relations. We are thankful for Japanese government support for the integration of the Maghreb and its economic and social development.

Political relations

Japan-Morocco bilateral relations have been considerably boosted

particularly during the first half of this year. This is a big step forward that opens up larger horizons for the already existing excellent relations between the two countries.

The visit of H.E. Saad Dine El Otmami, minister of foreign affairs, to Japan in March is by all means an assertion of the commitment of Japan and Morocco to further develop bilateral relations. The visit was an opportunity to exchange views between H.E. Otmami and H.E. Koichiro Genba, the foreign minister.

Further enhancement of economic cooperation and particularly in sectors of added value for both countries, notably renewable energies, was discussed. The role of the private sector in further promoting relations has been at the center of the minister's discussions with the Keidanren, who commended the efforts of Morocco to foster the business environment for Japanese companies.

The visit of H.E. El Otmami to Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, was a strong signal of the continuous support to the community affected by the tragic events of March 11, 2011, and an opportunity to reiterate the expressions of sympathy and solidarity with the people of the Tohoku region.

During his visit to Casablanca and Rabat on May 4, H.E. Genba was received in audience by His Majesty King Mohammed VI and H.E. Benkirane, and held talks with H.E. El Otmami.

H.E. Genba expressed his satisfaction as to the excellent relations existing between the Imperial family of Japan and the

Royal family of Morocco, and expressed his gratitude for the various types of heartwarming support that Japan received from Morocco following the Great East Japan Earthquake.

The Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) Ministerial Follow-up Meeting was held from May 5 to 6 in Marrakech. Ministers and representatives from 78 countries, including 51 African nations, 31 international and regional organizations, and civil society and private sector organizations attended the conference, chaired by H.E. El Otmami and H.E. Genba.

The participants at the meeting confirmed that with one year to go before TICAD V, scheduled for June 1-3, 2013, steady progress is being made in implementing the Yokohama Action Plan as a starting point for the preparation process.



Offering support: Moroccan Foreign Minister Saad Dine El Otmami visits Hisanohama Port in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, on March 7. EMBASSY OF THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

Economic relations

In the fisheries area, the consultations held in February took place in Tokyo within the spirit of support, assistance and solidarity that has always marked the meetings since the conclusion of the fisheries agreement back in 1985.

We express our gratitude to the continuous efforts of Japan to develop the fisheries sector in Morocco and further enhance the capacity of Moroccan fishermen to modernize their means of operation.

During this meeting, Morocco extended its assistance to eight fishing vessels of the Tohoku region to fish free of charge in Moroccan waters in 2012 and 2013.

In November 2011, a high-level economic delegation from the economic sector visited Japan. It was composed of officials in charge of the promotion of investment, the Tangier Mediterranean Special Agency, the auto-

motive industry and solar energy.

The delegation also introduced and emphasized the comparative advantages with which Morocco is blessed, namely its strategic position; its multiple agreements with the European Union, the U.S., Arab countries and many African countries, which represent a big incentive for attracting foreign investors from around the world.

Economic developments

Morocco continues to develop its economic infrastructure in the service of its economy particularly with regard to transport, in line with the economic policy of fostering the international partnership and promoting sound economic cooperation with its world partners.

The packages of economic reforms coupled with the leveling of Moroccan companies in key economic sectors initiated during the last decade have had a positive impact on the economic indicators of the country.

Despite an unfavorable international economic environment, Morocco's economy grew by 4.1 percent in 2010 and at a 4.6 percent rate in 2011. The government projects a growth rate of 3.5 to 4 percent in 2012.

Most recently, the tramway in the capital city of Rabat, which is now recognized as a World Heritage by UNESCO, has been operating and the same project will be inaugurated this year in Casablanca to allow the vibrant economic center of the country to further develop its transportation and infrastructure.

I will conclude my message by wishing for a steady recovery for the Tohoku region and its inhabitants. I am convinced Japan will come out stronger and more prosperous from such a difficult and unprecedented, tough experience.

The first high-speed train (TGV) linking the northern city of Tangier to the Atlantic port city of Agadir was launched in 2009. The first section, Tangier-Casablanca, has entered the implementation phase. In fact, the highway network will be further developed with the recent inauguration of the Fes-Oujda highway.

These projects provide business opportunities for international companies, particularly for the Japanese private sector. I notice, with great satisfaction, that Morocco is attracting an ever increasing number of Japanese companies in the sectors of electronics, auto parts and tourism, which contributes in part to the economic development of the country.

Cultural exchanges

I take a very positive note of the growing interest shown by the educational authorities of Japan toward Morocco and the North Africa region.

The University of Tsukuba in Ibaraki Prefecture has engaged in many programs with Moroccan universities to deepen their cooperation and their relationship. In this regard, Tsukuba University has signed an academic exchange agreement with the Cadi Ayyad University of Marrakech, and initiated other exchange agreements with Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, the University Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah of Fes and the Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire Hassan II of Rabat.

I will conclude my message by wishing for a steady recovery for the Tohoku region and its inhabitants. I am convinced Japan will come out stronger and more prosperous from such a difficult and unprecedented, tough experience.

Friendly relations deepen on various levels

Kenji Kosaka
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-MOROCCO PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE

On the auspicious occasion of the 13th anniversary of the accession to the throne of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, and on behalf of the Japan-Morocco Parliamentary Friendship League, I would like to extend my warmest greetings and heartfelt congratulations to His Majesty, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Moulay Al Hassan, the members of the Royal Family, the government and people of Morocco.

Under the new constitution, a new Moroccan government was established in January 2012, led by the prime minister, H.E. Abdelilah Benkirane, when he presented the government to His Majesty King Mohammed VI.

In fact, the excellent relationships binding the Imperial family of Japan and the Royal family in Morocco have strengthened the commitment of high-level officials from both sides to work together in order to consolidate these relations. I would also like to express my gratitude for the various types of



heartwarming support that Japan received from Morocco following the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011.

Japan and Morocco share so many noble values that have recently marked both the bilateral and multilateral levels of cooperation. Both countries have been enjoying very friendly relations based on a deep faith in peace, dialogue and cooperation.

I was very pleased to meet H.E. Saad Dine El Otmami, minister of foreign affairs, during his successful visit to Japan in March 2012; the minister had many fruitful contacts with Japanese political and economic circles.

I was also pleased and honored that Morocco hosted the Fourth Ministerial Follow-up Meeting of TICAD IV (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) held in Marrakech on May 5 and 6. On this occasion, Foreign Minister Koichiro Genba visited Marrakech and this meeting was a resounding success. Minister Genba also paid courtesy calls on His Majesty King Mohammed VI and H.E. Benkirane, the prime minister.

To conclude, I would like once again to convey my heartfelt congratulations to His Majesty and the people of Morocco on the throne celebration day with a strong wish to make relations between our friendly countries expand even more.

Seigi Hinata
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-MOROCCO ASSOCIATION

On the occasion of the 13th anniversary of the enthronement of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the King of Morocco on behalf of all members of the Japan-Morocco Association.

On this auspicious occasion, I would like to express also my sincere greetings to Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Salma, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Moulay Al Hassan, Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Khadija and all other members of the Royal family as well as the people and the government of the Kingdom of Morocco.

I am happy to note that the bilateral relations between Japan and Morocco continue to be on a steady development track in



Bilateral ties continue to develop as cooperation programs increase in many fields

various fields, such as the economic and technical cooperation, the investments in the private sector, tourism and others.

In particular, two important bilateral contacts took place this year, one in March and the other in May.

In fact, in March, we had the opportunity to welcome Saad Dine El Otmami, minister for foreign affairs of Morocco, on the occasion of his official visit to our country.

And the other event of importance was the visit of Foreign Minister Koichiro Genba to Morocco in early May.

Both events confirmed our close ties as well as led to the beginning of new joint programs such as the solar energy development project in Morocco.

In addition to these governmental efforts, there was also a new initiative by the Moroccan private sector to focus more of its attention to Asia and Japan.

In this connection, I should mention that I was invited by the Diplomatic Foundation headed

by Abdelati Habek to participate as one of the speakers in the Morocco-Asia Business Forum held in Rabat in March, organized by his foundation in cooperation with the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I was very encouraged to see this first forum by the Moroccan side to explore opportunities for Moroccan and Asian Businesses.

A number of interesting proposals were advanced by the participants to the forum and I am looking forward to seeing their gradual implementation in the coming years.

Coming back to report on the various activities of our Japan-Morocco Association — made up entirely of private sector volunteers — we have seen a steady growth in the number of members and we are beginning to have an increasing number of cultural programs, such as Moroccan cuisine luncheons or Moroccan argan oil and mint tea workshops.

Also our big annual event Moroccan Night, with Moroccan music, food and fashion, attracted

more than 300 visitors last year. We will be planning another big night in November with the cooperation of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in Japan. We work closely with the embassy to realize various cultural and economic events on a yearly basis so that all the Japanese participants

to these events can deepen their understanding of Morocco as well as Japan-Morocco relations.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate my sincere wish to further strengthen the existing excellent relationship between the people of Japan and the people of Morocco.

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