

Côte d'Ivoire independence day

Hope has been reborn for Côte d'Ivoire

The following are edited excerpts of an interview with H.E. Jérôme Klôh Weya, the ambassador of Côte d'Ivoire, on the occasion of the nation's Independence Day, celebrated every Aug. 7 since 1960.

I would like to thank The Japan Times for this opportunity to talk about my country, which is celebrating the 52nd anniversary of its independence and the 50th anniversary of its relations with Japan. On behalf of the president of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, the Ivorian people and government, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my respectful greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko. I would also like to salute Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, the government and the Japanese people for their support in the performance of my duties as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire in Japan.

Please give us a brief overview of the political and economic situation in Côte d'Ivoire since President Alassane Ouattara officially assumed the post in May 2011.

Since the election at the helm of my country of President Ouattara, a renowned economist and former deputy director general of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a new era has begun for Côte d'Ivoire. Many things have much improved at home and hope in the country has been reborn.

There have been great advances in terms of democracy in Côte d'Ivoire. Free and transparent parliamentary elections have been successfully held in December 2011 and February 2012. Fully aware that the reconstruction of the country cannot be achieved without peace, President Ouattara takes concrete actions every day for the reconciliation between Ivoirians. In this spirit, he has created the Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In addition, the government is working actively to normalize and to strengthen the security situation throughout the territory. President Ouattara, whose goal is to make Côte d'Ivoire an emerging country in the next 20 years, is undertaking major reconstruction projects in all economic and social areas, namely infrastructure (roads, highways, bridges, hotels, etc.) and social facilities (health centers, schools, universities, hospitals, etc.).

For this vast rebuilding program, the completion point of the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative arrives just in time because the cancellation of a part of the debt will facilitate its implementation. To this effect, the country not only relies on the government-to-government cooperation but also — and above all — on the public-private partnership (PPP). That is the reason we welcome the recent great acts of cooperation and friendship between Côte d'Ivoire and Japan, namely:



Ambassador of Côte d'Ivoire Jérôme Klôh Weya

- The return to Côte d'Ivoire of major Japanese industrial and commercial groups such as Sumitomo Corp., Ajinomoto Group, Mitsubishi Corp., etc.;

- The reopening of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) and JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) offices in Côte d'Ivoire;

- The economic prospecting mission to Côte d'Ivoire of about 30 Japanese business leaders based in South Africa, who had an audience with the president of the republic on July 5, 2012;

- The stay in Japan, from June 24 to July 2, 2012, of 19 senior officials on the invitation of the Japanese government to attend an Official Development Assistance (ODA) Seminar co-organized by JICA and JETRO.

- The visit to Côte d'Ivoire of Toshiyuki Kato, a parliamentary vice minister of Foreign Affairs, on July 25 and 26.

These signals portend a better future for my country under the leadership of President Ouattara.

Côte d'Ivoire has gone through difficult times and political changes since 2002. How have these changes affected Côte d'Ivoire's foreign relations?

Côte d'Ivoire suffered a lot from the politico-military crisis it went through during the 10 years. The economy of the country fell to its lowest level. Most foreign investors left Côte d'Ivoire and some embassies closed their offices. The Bretton Woods institutions, the IMF and World Bank, suspended all cooperation with the country. Many countries recommended their citizens and companies to avoid Côte d'Ivoire.

Thanks to God, with the support of the international community, the crisis ended in 2010 with the election of President



Monument: The Notre Dame de la Paix basilica in Yamoussoukro is the largest ever built in the world. EMBASSY OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Ouattara as the head of the country, and the horizon is clarified. Our foreign relations have become normal again.

What are your thoughts on the election of President Ouattara as chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)?

It is a sense of pride that drives me. This election confirms the coming back of Côte d'Ivoire onto the international scene. The stature and the prestige of President Ouattara have been recognized by his peers in West Africa through this election. West Africa faces enormous challenges now. The unanimity around the election of President Ouattara and the support of his peers should permit him to find the solutions to these challenges.

Please give us a brief overview of bilateral relations with Japan, which mark their 50th anniversary this year.

Côte d'Ivoire and Japan have maintained a fruitful and exemplary cooperation in various fields for more than half a century. Indeed, the diplomatic relations between Côte d'Ivoire and Japan were established in 1961. H.E. Kenichi Fuji, first ambassador of Japan to Côte d'Ivoire, was appointed on Nov. 2, 1966, and H.E. Pierre Nelson Coffi, ambassador of Côte d'Ivoire to Japan, was appointed on May 22, 1969. The cooperation between the two countries has been dynamic and multifaceted. However, 10 years of crisis dealt a blow to this cooperation.

The Japanese government, which kept hope for a return of peace in Côte d'Ivoire, has reoriented its cooperation toward social and humanitarian actions in favor of the vulnerable population in the following sectors: education, agriculture (food aid), support for DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration), assistance to NGOs through donations to the local micro-projects contributing to human security, and various contributions through the organizations of the United Nations.

It is also worth knowing that every year the Japanese government grants several fellowships and scholarships to Ivoirians in disciplines such as engineering, agriculture, health, computer science and environment. In any event, the Japanese assistance to Côte d'Ivoire is remarkable and



Strengthening ties: Côte d'Ivoire's President Alassane Ouattara (front row, third from right) meets with Japanese business leaders based in South Africa on July 5 in Abidjan. Below: Senior Ivorian officials attend an ODA seminar on June 28 in Tokyo. EMBASSY OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

has been very much appreciated for many years.

What would be a form of effective assistance from Japan in supporting Côte d'Ivoire's efforts toward social and economic development?

The economic and social infrastructure (roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, health centers) were destroyed or in a state of advanced disrepair. Our current needs are enormous in all sectors. The recent seminar should help Côte d'Ivoire to identify sectors where the Japanese government can help us. I seize this occasion to reiterate to the Japanese government, through JICA and JETRO, the gratitude of the Ivorian people and government for hosting this seminar.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Tokushukai Medical Group for its fruitful cooperation with Côte d'Ivoire for offering hemodialysis equipment and training the Ivorian staff for their maintenance.

What are some possibilities for strengthening Japan's economic relationship and promoting investment into Côte d'Ivoire?

There are many opportunities to reinforce the economic relations with Japan and to promote Japanese investments in Côte d'Ivoire. The post-crisis reconstruction is a huge work site where there is room for everyone, including Japanese companies.

Côte d'Ivoire has many economic assets: first producer of cocoa in the world with 1.4 million tons per year or about 40 percent of the world's production, second world producer of cashew nuts behind India with 350,000 tons per year. It is the first African producer of natural rubber, the second African producer of palm oil and the third African producer of coffee. Côte d'Ivoire also has vast fields of oil and gas, gold, diamond, and ferrous metals, etc.

Therefore, I invite businessmen and CEOs of major Japanese companies to visit Côte d'Ivoire in order to find by themselves the existing potentialities.

Next year will be the 20th anniversary of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). Can you tell us how the people of Côte d'Ivoire have benefited from the TICAD process? Also, what are Côte d'Ivoire's expectations for TICAD V next year?

The people of Côte d'Ivoire have benefited from the TICAD process through grant aid and loans in various sectors, such as:



- Prevention of infectious diseases in Côte d'Ivoire;
- Food aid;
- Youth training program for post-conflict recovery and peace building (through UNIDO, the U.N. Industrial Development Organization);
- Forest preservation program;
- Grant assistance for grassroots human security projects;

The projects have been implemented by the government of Côte d'Ivoire, NGOs or the organizations of the U.N.

Côte d'Ivoire is emerging from a post-election crisis with the destruction of some infrastructure. Regarding TICAD V, an intervention by the government of Japan in the infrastructure sector would be highly appreciated.

What are the recommended tourism destinations?

We have different types of tourism to suit all tastes and ages:

As for ecological tourism, there are nine national forests and wildlife parks in the country covering over 1.7 million hectares, which is nearly 6 percent of the total surface of the country. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that one of them, the Tai National Park, as well as the city of Grand-Bassam, the first capital of Côte d'Ivoire, with its colonial remnants, have been classified by UNESCO as World Heritage sites.

With a 560-km coastline of some of the most beautiful shores in the subregion and more than 300 hectares of lagoons, Côte d'Ivoire offers a wide range of top-class seaside facilities as well.

In the field of cultural tourism, Côte d'Ivoire is a symbol of fascinating Africa because of the diversity of its population, with more than 60 ethnic groups, a fact illustrated by a great variety

of cultural events we have. For example:

- The weeklong Carnival of Bouaké occurs each March;
- The Fête du Dipri in Gomon, near Abidjan, in April.

Religious sites include the Notre Dame de la Paix basilica in Yamoussoukro, the largest ever built in the world. The hundred-year-old mosques in Kong, Kawara and Samatigoula, in the north of the country, constitute first-choice attractions for tourists.

For sports and adventure, the main attractions are sport fishing, the rally race of Bandama, diving, underwater hunting, surfing, water skiing, sailing and wind surfing.

Large plantations of coffee, cocoa, palm trees, pineapples, rubber, etc., can also be visited.

What kinds of Côte d'Ivoire cultural events have been planned in Japan this year?

An exhibition of masks, statues, musical instruments and textiles from Côte d'Ivoire is under way at the African Art Museum in Hokuto, Yamanashi Prefecture, until Oct. 1. Another show will run there from Oct. 4 until the end of November.

To conclude, I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to The Japan Times, Tokyo Kankan Co., Hotel Ibis Co., Mitsubishi Corp. and Ajinomoto Co., our partners this year again, together with the Imperial Hotel, who have so generously sponsored the embassy on this memorable occasion of the 52nd anniversary. I thank them for their interest in Côte d'Ivoire. I greet my Ivorian citizens who live in Japan and benefit from the hospitality and opportunities offered to them. They are the living bridge between Japan and Côte d'Ivoire.

Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire
on the 52nd Anniversary of
Their Independence Day

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