

Cuba national day

Making transformations with people's help

Marcos Rodriguez Costa
AMBASSADOR OF CUBA

Jan. 1 marks the 54th anniversary of the triumph of the Revolution, which ultimately gave independence to all Cubans, after more than 100 years of struggle.

On this significant date, I am honored to express, on behalf of the Cuban people and government, my best wishes for peace, prosperity and friendship to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and other members of the Imperial family, as well as to the government and friendly people of Japan.

The socialist model of development that has been endorsed by every Cuban, all along the course of these 54 years, is going through a process of deep changes and transformations that started upon the adoption of the Draft Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy, by the VI Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, held in April 2010. A transcendental programmatic document, that was subject of a broad and democratic national debate, opens to all citizens before its final approval.

As an essential part of this process, Cuba will continue to preserve and enhance its achievements in the fields of health, education, justice and social inclusion, while continuing to drive, with greater efficiency and quality, the economic development for the benefit of all people.

This wide and very complex process, where obstacles, difficulties, progress, setbacks and adjustments are met, is carried out with determination and without unnecessary haste, making sure it is always supported by a broad national consensus.

Central planning will con-

tinue ruling the national economic management, but direct state management in driving the economy will be restricted to strategic areas of the economic activity.

Similarly, the state apparatus at the central level continues its reorganization, compacting functions and ministries, and giving enterprises, provincial and municipal government authorities, greater management autonomy and authority, which so far was too much centralized.

In the important agricultural sector, parcels of idle land, which nowadays covers an area of 1 million hectares, continue to be given in usufruct to those who would apply for it, in order to use it in productive activities. This policy has begun to help increase food production, with a consequent reduction of expensive imports and a gradual introduction of facilities, financial and technical support for new agricultural producers.

As part of this new economic model, the number of self-employed people, engaged in productive activity or services, that up to these days accounts for almost 400,000 workers, continues growing.

The tourism industry has consolidated as one of the major sources of income in the country. Three million visitors a year has become an achievable goal for this industry.

The pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry remains a priority and an important source of revenue from exports of vaccines, generic drugs and diagnostic and hospital care equipment, all made in Cuba.

Cuba also continues increasing the export of medical services, which is nowadays a major source of income for the country.

Work is in progress on important nationwide infrastructure projects, like the one at the Special Zone of Development of Mariel Port, to the west



Cuban President Raul Castro

of Havana, which involves the construction of a container and cargo terminal, an area of logistic activities and others of import-export productive activities, as well as an area to be a support base for offshore oil exploration.

At the end of 2012, a 3.1 percent gross domestic product (GDP) growth is estimated, at constant prices, lower than the 3.4 percent GDP growth that had been expected.

However, there has been a favorable trend in the whole economy, since the development of the country has grown and continues growing, in line with the effort made by all our people to mitigate the difficulties arising from the global economic crisis, the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by U.S. administrations on Cuba for over 50 years, the increase of food prices in the international market, as well as the Cuban economic model's own inadequacies, all of which constitute an objective limitation for further development of the productive forces. A 3.7 percent GDP growth is estimated for the 2013.

In foreign policy, Cuba works in favor of world peace, total and complete disarmament, including nuclear weapons, and calls for the creation of regional zones free of such weapons. Cuba opposes the double standards in the implementation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty,

since a group of nuclear powers continue improving their weapons arsenal, while limiting and conditioning everybody's right to the development and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Cuba condemns the practice of terrorism, whatever the form and whatever the motives. For years, Cuba has been a victim of multiple terrorist attacks carried out by anti-Cuban organizations, based in United States territory.

As part of Cuba's struggle to defend itself against these criminal actions, which have claimed many lives and caused enormous material damage, five young antiterrorist Cuban fighters were infiltrated in these organizations in order to know about their plans and neutralize them. Today, they are serving unfair sentences in U.S. prisons, while the whole world demands their immediate release.

The joint international cooperation that Cuba provides, as an essential part of its foreign policy, is expressed in more than 50,000 Cuban professionals, who serve in 101 countries, with over 70 percent of such collaboration in the field of health. Today, Cuban doctors are saving lives in Latin America, Africa and even in small Pacific Islands.

Cuba's relations with Japan continued to consolidate in 2012, with a wide number of high-level visits and exchanges between the foreign ministries and governments of the two countries.

From summer 2013 until October 2014, we will begin the celebration of the first Japanese delegation's trip to Cuba in 1614, 400 years ago, sent by Date Masamune, and led by samurai Hasekura Tsunenaga, from Sendai, which remained in Havana for two weeks, before crossing the Atlantic Ocean on their way to Rome, via Spain. This first contact between Japan and Cuba is a symbol of the historic friendship between the two countries.



Capital: Havana is home to El Capitolio (left), or the National Capitol Building, which was the seat of the government until the Cuban Revolution triumphed in 1959, and is now used as a museum. EMBASSY OF CUBA



Looking toward the entrance of Havana Bay, a statue of samurai Hasekura is admired by all Cuban people.

In 2013, the third World Baseball Classic Tournament will also be held in Japan, an occasion where Japan's and Cuba's teams will have several friendly baseball games that will undoubtedly help to strengthen, even further, the relationship between two people who love baseball.

For decades, the Japanese business community has had a good and important relationship with Cuba, supplying equipment and high-quality technology.

Thus, Cuba hopes to have the participation of Japanese companies, primarily in various investment schemes and development in the areas of exploration and exploitation of oil and gas, mining, tourism industry and in the pharmaceutical industry.

Cuban traditional exports mainly of rum, cigars, coffee, honey and seafood to the Japanese market have earned prestige and Cuba is working hard so that these products are increasingly in the consumers' preference.

We are confident that the beloved Japanese people will successfully continue on the road to

recovery to reverse the great human and material losses caused by the nuclear power plant accident and the devastating tsunami that followed the earthquake of March 11, 2011.

Japan is still facing great difficulties, but it has also had the opportunity to receive signs of friendship and solidarity from all over the world, including that of the Cuban people and their government, confirming the importance of friendship, human solidarity and mutual collaboration or "kizuna."

I also want to take advantage of this opportunity to thank the

Japanese government, the organizations of solidarity with Cuba and Japanese friends in general, for the support and solidarity to the eastern Cuban provinces, which were recently severely affected after the strike of Hurricane Sandy.

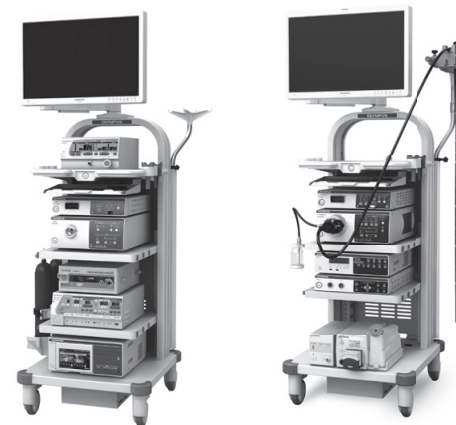
Finally, I want to express the esteem, respect and special consideration of all Cubans and their government, for the consistent and renewed expressions of solidarity and friendship, received over the years, from friendship organizations, parliamentarians, political parties and the Japanese society as a whole.

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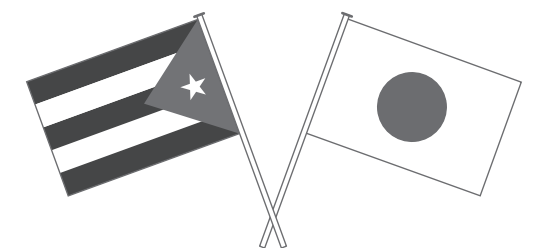
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