

Ecuador National Day

Strength through adversity and mutual cooperation

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AMBASSADOR OF ECUADOR

Ecuador commemorates 207 years since its Proclamation of Independence on Aug. 10 and, thanks to the invitation



from The Japan Times, as ambassador of Ecuador in Tokyo it's my privilege to greet Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, Prime Minister H.E. Shinzo Abe, the Japanese people and my fellow Ecuadorean compatriots living in Japan on this special day.

On April 16, the provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas in Ecuador and Japan's Kumamoto Prefecture suffered severe earthquakes, leaving hundreds of casualties and grave structural damage. In the case of Ecuador, the quake reached a magnitude of 7.8 and there have been 2,284 aftershocks to date, with 31 of them registering magnitudes over 5 degrees, causing 671 deaths and a terrible level of destruction.

Ecuador and Japan share a common border in the Pacific Ocean. Both countries are part of the "Ring of Fire," and thus share an extraordinary, but violent geography, characterized by a large number of volcanoes and earthquakes. This has obliged our peoples to become tough and resilient, but also friendly with their environment.

Japan and its people came to Ecuador with their hands extended in solidarity in this terrible moment, even though they

were having a similar experience in their own country. The Japanese government sent emergency assistance that same day and, through direct donations or via the Red Cross, the Japanese people have given their support. In turn, the Ecuadorean people and government have expressed their deep appreciation for these acts of friendship and solidarity.

The Ecuadorean community in Japan, touched by the generosity shown by the Japanese, started a campaign between its members to support reconstruction efforts in Kumamoto, offering a donation of Ecuadorean coffee to the thousands of volunteers working in relief efforts in that hard-hit region.

Despite general economic difficulties around the world, thanks to careful planning and sound economic management, Ecuador was able to pursue and conclude the construction of major infrastructure projects, including several hydroelectric dams, multipurpose water management projects, the national highways, roads and paths network, as well as the repowering of the Esmeraldas Oil Refinery, which was built four decades ago by several Japanese companies.

These efforts have yielded results within the past six months, even before Ecuador was hit by April's earthquake, during the passage of El Niño, which was responsible for an extreme increase in the levels of rain. The infrastructure built to confront this natural phenomenon worked as planned and the damage done to rural and urban areas was significantly decreased.

Despite a drop in oil prices, the Ecuadorean economy grew by 3.8 percent in 2014 and 0.4

percent in 2015. Non-oil GDP, which basically responds to public policy, grew 4.3 percent, or four times the Latin American average of 1.1 percent. Tax revenues accounted for more than 50 percent of the general budget and value added tax, which is an indicator of the dynamism of the economy, showed a cumulative growth of 15 percent. On April 2015, the private financial sector increased by 5.13 percent, reflecting public trust. Annual inflation was 4.32 percent, poverty fell by 12.5 points and the unemployment rate fell to 3.8 percent. These indicators show that the Ecuadorean economy is solid and has a deep humanistic vision.

This last decade, Ecuador has experienced an impressive and radical transformation of its legal framework (Constitution and related laws), national infrastructure and investment environment. With an estimated GDP of \$67 billion in 2011, and an average growth of more than 5 percent, it presents an extraordinary outlook for its future. From 2000 onward, Ecuador has maintained stable macroeconomic figures, solid fiscal discipline and inflation under 2 percent. And in 2017, it will reach an energy self-sufficiency — using no fossil fuels — and will begin exporting clean electricity to neighboring countries.

Thanks to its privileged geographical position and landscape, Ecuador enjoys some of the most varied climates, which translate into the widest and most sought-after sites and products. For this, it has been designated as one of only 17 megadiverse countries in the world, while the Galapagos Islands — made famous by



Galapagos National Park EMBASSY OF ECUADOR

Charles Darwin's research on evolution — further add to Ecuador's unique natural richness.

In recent years the World Travel Awards have seen Ecuador repeatedly named as one of the most important global tourism destinations, for having — among many other characteristics — the "Best preserved historic center in Latin America," for being home to 33 natural reserves protected by the government, as well as many biologically significant and extensive tropical forests. These reserves include the Sangay and Galapagos National parks and the Galapagos Marine Reserve that have, due to their irreplaceable natural value, been declared UNESCO Natural World Heritage sites. Ecuador is also home to 27 different ethnic groups that all possess a priceless and unique cultural heritage and has been recognized as "South America's Green Destination."

Trade is also very important and, without even knowing it, Japanese people frequently purchase high-quality Ecuadorean products such as shrimp, bananas, orchids, golden berries, broccoli, palm hearts, yellowfin tuna, roses, coffee, cocoa beans

world," prompting foreign chocolatiers to go to Ecuador and produce their creations in country. It is with delight that we announce that one of these brands can now be found in Japan's best retail stores.

This October, the city of Quito — Ecuador's capital — will host the U.N. Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, or "Habitat III." The conference will draw more than 20,000 delegates from around the world with the aim of reinvigorating the global commitment to sustainable urbanization, following the adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Ecuador is a very solid democracy, with presidential and congressional elections to be held in the first trimester of 2017 and the winner being sworn in as the new president of the Republic on May 24.

Relations between our countries have been very active over the last decade and include a visit to Tokyo by President Rafael Correa in 2010 and visits by several high-ranking officials of both countries. Our governments have pledged to strengthen relations, something that will be highlighted in 2018, when we celebrate the first century of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

For this unique occasion, both our ministries of foreign affairs have agreed to carry out a very special program, with inclusive, multicultural and multiethnic political, economic and cultural activities open to the general public. As one example of these, priority attention will be given to the establishment in Ecuador of the "Dr. Hideyo Noguchi Chair," to pay tribute to the fruitful work of this Japanese scholar, who in 1918 performed scientific research in Ecuador for the eradication of yellow fever. In this sense, prestigious Ecuadorean and Japanese uni-

versities will co-develop scientific research and academic exchange programs in the fields of medicine and biology.

Reiterating my special greetings in this significant date, I express my best wishes of prosperity and health to the emperor and empress, the Imperial family, the prime minister and all people of Japan. Finally, allow me to share with you the decision of the Ecuadorean government and its diplomatic mission in Tokyo to further strengthen the friendly relations and cooperation that exist between both nations.

Congratulations

to the People of

Ecuador on

the 207th Anniversary of

Their Independence

 Mitsubishi Corporation

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