

Rwanda National Day

Rwanda: Becoming Africa's ICT hub

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Rwanda gained its political independence from colonial rule on July 1, 1962. The pre-independence period of colonial rule was characterized by exploitive politics of divide and rule, while the post-independence period was marked by extremist administrations that ruled by political exclusion and sectarianism that culminated in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. The Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) under the leadership of H.E. President Paul Kagame stopped the genocide against the Tutsis on July 4, 1994, liberating the country from the genocidal forces. This embarked Rwanda on a journey to heal the nation through the establishment of national unity and reconciliation, peace and stability and building its economy based on a vision that guarantees Rwandans a prosperous future. On this July 4 Rwandans are celebrating the 23rd Anniversary of the Liberation Day of Rwanda.

On this occasion, it is my greatest honor and privilege to convey to Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial family, the government and the entire people of Japan the warmest greetings and best wishes from the president of the Republic of Rwanda, the government and people of Rwanda

Rwandans are using this occasion of the 23rd anniversary of their liberation to celebrate a story of triumph over despair. This is a story of the resilience of the people, their dreams, their hopes, aspirations and their optimism that have transformed Rwanda into one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa today with average GDP growth of 7 percent over the last 10 years. This rapid economic growth has translated into more

equality and increased access to services, including health care and education for all.

Rwanda set its long-term development goals defined in its "Vision 2020," which is its long-term development strategy from 2000-2020. The strategy seeks to transform the country from a low-income agriculture-based economy to a knowledge-based, service-oriented, information and communications technology-driven economy with middle-income country status by 2020. The transformation Rwanda has achieved through the implementation of this vision was possible due to very ambitious and wide-ranging reforms across all sectors of the economy, including the creation of Rwanda Development Board's One Stop Centre to facilitate ease of doing business in Rwanda with the overall vision of transforming Rwanda into a dynamic global hub for business, investment and innovation. Today it takes only four hours to open a business. Rwanda is the most secure, least corrupt and cleanest country on the continent. Vast opportunities exist for local and foreign direct investments including in agriculture, information and communications technology (ICT), manufacturing, energy, mining and services, particularly in the financial services and banking, tourism, mining and other sectors.

This message focuses on ICT sector development and increasing cooperation and partnership between Rwanda and Japan in this area, as well as the growing interest of Japanese companies in Rwanda's growing ICT sector.

Rwanda has recognized ICT as a holistic tool for development and it has been steadfastly and diligently developing ICT as a development enabler and accelerator for the past two decades. The result of this continuous push for the ICT-led development from the government of Rwanda has resulted in Rwanda being recognized as an ICT leader within the African continent.

Rwanda is now catalyzing its recognition as an ICT nation and its geographical loca-

tion at the center of the African continent to consolidate its position as an ICT hub for the continent. In order to create an appropriate enabling environment as the continental ICT hub, Rwanda has been aggressively pushing for the creation of innovation ecosystems, ICT financial mechanisms, ICT parks in the free trade zone (Kigali Innovation City), business-friendly environment and incentives and high-level human capacity development. The ecosystem is aimed both at creating a competitive ICT sector for Rwanda and attracting regional and international ICT companies, academic and research institutions, as well as international ICT for development organizations to establish their subsidiaries and African headquarters in Rwanda. Some examples already in place include Carnegie Mellon University, which opened a branch in Rwanda offering the same academic quality as it offers in the U.S., and the Smart Africa Secretariat in Kigali.

Rwanda has put in place robust ICT infrastructure, including a national fiber optic backbone for broadband covering the whole country, and LTE 4G coverage in 26 cities. Internet-capable ICT buses move in local communities supporting ICT training on basic skills. Under the One laptop per Child (OLP) program, primary school children are provided with laptops and ICT education from a very early age.

Rwanda's path toward creating a knowledge-based economy has also benefited greatly from partnerships and cooperation with development partners, such as Japan. The government of Japan, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), has been supporting ICT development in Rwanda, particularly over the last seven years. Japan started its support in ICT human resources capacity building through the Tumba College of Technology and fielding ICT volunteers through Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) and through JICA's contribution to ICT policy formulation and implementation and fostering a vibrant

ICT private sector. Additionally, Rwandan students have been dispatched to Japan under the African Business Education (ABE) Initiative to earn master's degrees in ICT and innovation and connect with Japanese businesses and such institution as the Kobe Institute of Computing (KIC) Graduate School and other premier institutions in Japan.

Japan has also been an integral partner for Rwanda's effort to create an innovation ecosystem most notably through its support of such institutions as innovation center kLab (Knowledge Lab) and FabLab. Japan has also begun implementing a grass-roots project to create a new generation of ICT experts in the area of the internet of things or IoT.

Over the last year Rwanda has seen a great


surge in the interest of Japanese companies to expand their businesses in Rwanda and Africa. The number of Japanese companies interested in Rwanda is growing with many more Japanese companies now visiting Rwanda and seeking concrete business opportunities. Several of them are already operating in Rwanda and have made Rwanda their regional headquarters.

During the forthcoming Japan-Africa Business Forum in Tokyo on July 25 and 26, the Rwanda delegation will organize the "Rwanda-African ICT Business Hub" session. We wish to invite all interested companies and partners in Japan to come to this seminar to learn more about Africa's growing business opportunities in the area of ICT. The session


will highlight Rwanda's current business environment and African business opportunities through Rwanda.

We would like to express our profound gratitude to the government and people of Japan for the support they have extended to Rwanda in its quest for economic development. We highly value our continued partnership.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to various institutions, companies and individuals in Japan for their support and business engagements in Rwanda, and particularly to the management of Toyota Tsusho Corp. and African Home Touch for sponsoring the publication of this article.




 Congratulations
 to the People of
 the Republic of Rwanda
 on the 55th Anniversary
 of the Independence
 and 23rd Anniversary
 of the Liberation Day



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