

Benin National Day

The ideal time for investment for major economic progress

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The commemoration of Benin's 57th Anniversary of its National Day reflects the cordial and fraternal ties that characterize the relationship between Benin and Japan. We cherish the fact that

since the establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries in 1961, the Japanese government and its people have always stood by Benin. But that is not enough with regard to the huge and numerous economic potentials of Africa, especially West Africa, to which Benin belongs.

That is why this year's message is intended as a call for major economic progress between both countries, especially as it comes just after the second Japan-Africa Business Forum, held on July 25 and 26. May the organizers of the forum, namely the African Development Bank and the African Diplomatic Corps, find here, the marks of my deepest gratitude to them.

But before that, one of the most important points to be noted is the fact that since the accession to power, on April 6, 2016, of the President of the Republic of Benin, Head of State and Head of Government, Patrice Talon, after democratic and transparent elections, the cooperation between Benin and Japan has undergone a notable evolution. This evolution has been notably through the request addressed by the president, relating to the enhancement of



President Patrice Talon

Japanese cooperation in the field of infrastructure, in addition to the traditional areas of Japanese intervention in Benin, which include health, education, agriculture, training and capacity building through the African Business Education Initiative and more.

It's important to note that the talks for the achievement of the foregoing, started on the occasion of the bilateral meeting between our president and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, within the framework of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI), held in Nairobi, in August 2016. Moreover, our president has been invited to Japan by the Japanese prime minister to deepen exchanges and lay the foundations for a new dynamic and efficient cooperation between Benin and Japan in many domains.

The same issue has been also shared,

on the same occasion, during the meeting between President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Shinichi Kitaoka.

The results of these exchanges were made visible through the recommendations of the bilateral consultations held in Cotonou on March 3, in the presence of representatives of JICA and members of the government of Benin.

Indeed, in the wake of the bilateral consultations, a study mission visited Benin in July as part of the project to renovate the Autonomous Port of Cotonou. The studies of feasibility of other attractive and profitable projects in terms of infrastructure (tollroads, railways, airports and more) are available and ready for funding.

While TICAD is a well-defined general policy of cooperation between Africa and Japan, with clear objectives, the organization in Tokyo of the second Japan-Africa Business Forum on July 25 and 26 is an effective means of achieving the objectives set by it. Two ministers of the government of the Republic of Benin, namely Minister of Economy and Finance Romuald Wadagni, Minister of Living Environment and Sustainable Development Jose Didier Tonato, as well as Director General of the Autonomous Fund of Depreciation Gilles Guerard, and representatives of Benin's private sector participated in the forum.

In fact, the best way of mobilizing financial and technical resources under the Nairobi Declaration and its Action Plan's implementation is down to two essential points. First, is in the will of setting up strong and sustainable links both between

the Japanese and African private sectors and between Japanese and African governments. Second, is in the determination and availability of Japanese financial institutions to provide the necessary funds for the implementation of projects submitted to them.

It must be remembered that the president's government is mainly composed of people from the private sector like himself; determined to end certain old practices unfavorable to the business climate and to the development of most African countries. Since 1960, Benin's government has managed to set up its Action Program with the aim of achieving its major priorities within the duration of the presidential term. These priorities are reflected in 45 flagship projects, taking into account all sectors of activities (energy, infrastructure, water supply, agriculture, education, digital economy, life, the environment and more) and designed, through their implementation, to reveal Benin. And that's why the physical and electronic media that carry them are titled "Revealing Benin" and are available at the Embassy of the Republic of Benin to Japan, in Japanese and English. The ongoing updating of the embassy's website will also make available all relevant information to the Japanese public.

Based on wide-ranging structural reforms and the investment of about 9.04 trillion West African francs, this program aims to restart the country's development.

As Benin contributes to integration, it is worth noting that it is a gateway to a potential market of more than 300 million people. In fact, through its geographic position,

Benin remains an outlet for the countries of the hinterland, such as Burkina Faso and Niger, but also a bridge between Togo and Nigeria, with many tourist attractions.

Summarily, it should be noted that the mentioned key projects are based on three essential pillars. These are the strengthening of governance, structural transformation of the economy and improvement of the living conditions of our population. One-third of these projects will be financed as a public investment program, both with the government's own funds and through a concessional lending mechanism. The remaining two-thirds will be financed by the private sector through a public-private partnership and on a win-win basis.

In view of the above, it should be pointed out that the mission of the Beninese authorities, on the sidelines of the recently concluded Japan-Africa Business Forum, which was mainly to reveal Benin to Japan through emerging innovations, was a great success in more ways than one.

In fact, the various audiences with the relevant Japanese authorities, such as Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Finance His Excellency Taro Aso and the State Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry His Excellency Yoshifumi Matsumura allowed us to present an overview on the achievements linked to the quality of the excellent relations between Japan and Benin and, above all, to consider the future by enhancing this cooperation, in light of the foregoing. It has also been the occasion for Benin's minister of finance to convey, hand in hand with his Japanese counterparts, the physical support of the 45 flagship projects of the govern-

ment of Benin.

The same exercise, in respect of the representatives of various institutes, namely JICA, the Japan External Trade Organization, Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Japan Bank for International Cooperation and others, has made it possible to involve all these development players in the search for financing to achieve the objectives contained in the Action Program of Benin's government.

It is the moment, more than ever, to reiterate our deep and sincere gratitude to the Imperial family, very respectfully to Their Majesties, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, to whom I wish good health and longevity. I'd also like to convey my heartfelt thanks to the prime minister and his government for the continuous and valuable support toward Africa, in general, and Benin in particular. I'd like to also thank the representatives of institutions involved in Benin and Japan technical cooperation, regarding their efforts to assist Benin permanently on its way of development objectives achievement, as set out by the 2063 Agenda.

To all diplomatic missions, international organizations and the EU delegation, I'd like to convey my warmest greetings and gratitude for their valuable assistance and support.

My gratitude also goes to the kind and friendly people of Japan to whom I wish peace and prosperity, to all those who are devoting themselves to promoting friendly relations between both peoples, especially the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, and Beninese associations in Japan.

Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Benin
on the Occasion of
the 57th Anniversary of
Their Independence



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