

Cuba National Day

Countries enjoy a warm four-century friendship

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AMBASSADOR OF CUBA

On Jan. 1 the Republic of Cuba, on its National Day, celebrates the 59th Anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution, which marks the climax of over a century of struggle for the true and final independence of the Cuban people.



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

Cuba greatly admires the ongoing progress achieved by the Japanese people in their social and economic development, especially regarding the preparations for the successful celebration of the 2020 Olympic Games.

The ties of friendship between our peoples span over 400 years. In 2018, we will be honoring the 120th anniversary of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to Cuba, while 2019 will mark 90 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our countries. Both occasions shall serve to continue strengthening our historical bonds.

In the aftermath of the destructive hurricane Irma, we received numerous tokens of solidarity from the Japanese people, government and businesses. We are deeply grateful for your assistance, which has been decisive for the recovery of our country and especially the Cuban families directly affected.

This year we were able to broaden our

bilateral exchange. It is worth noting the visit to Japan of the dean of the University of Havana, as well as the signing of important agreements for collaboration with Japanese partners in Kyoto and Tokyo. The organization of the first academic symposium on Cuba and the attendance of renowned researchers from both countries provided a unique chance to discuss issues of common interest.

There were also various visits to Cuba by Japanese parliamentary delegations to explore the opportunities for strengthening bilateral relations. Additionally, during the visit to Japan by the head of the Cuba-Japan Parliamentary Friendship League, an agreement was signed on inter-parliamentary collaboration.

The 14th Round of Bilateral Dialogue, headed on the Cuban side by the First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marcelino Medina, was of special significance to both parties and confirmed the strategic importance that Cuba grants to its relations with Japan.

We witnessed with great satisfaction the commemorations on the 50th anniversary of the death in combat of Ernesto Che Guevara, which included the screening of the film "Ernesto," where viewers can clearly see the profound impression his visit to Hiroshima and learning more of the devastation caused by the atomic bombs had. We also cannot forget the emotional homage paid to the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, a year after his passing. These are times in which we renew our commitment to uphold his legacy, and above all to carry on his struggle toward achieving peace, justice and the well being of all humanity.

In the economic and commercial aspects, there is sustained growth in the number of Japanese companies attracted to the Cuban market. Japan took part for the second year in a row in the 35th International Fair of Havana with its big-

gest showing in history and there was an increase of Japanese business representations in our capital, with the inclusion of the commercial house Toyota Tsusho.

In November, our country presented the fourth edition of the portfolio of opportunities in foreign investment, which already boasts a total of 456 projects and over \$10 billion of capital. Many projects are distributed all over the country, taking into account the National Development Plan for 2030, and have great appeal among the Japanese business community. The Port of Mariel Special Development Zone has garnered the attention of foreign investors due to the fiscal advantages offered. With over 50 projects, the development zone now has eight categories of industry, biotechnology, logistics, food industry, pharmaceuticals, construction, transport and

real estate.

Cuba has continued to perfect the legal framework for the attraction of foreign investment in accordance with the updating of our economic model. This will promote the production of goods and services in order to boost the social and economic development of the country, increase access to modern technologies and methods for business management, as well as provide new sources of employment.

The successful celebration of the first Cuba-Japan Conference on Infrastructure was proof of the existing potential for joint collaboration for the development of high-quality infrastructure, as well as the mutual interest in commencing negotiations next year on a bilateral agreement on reciprocal promotion and protection of investments. Bilateral cooperation also experienced

substantial progress, based on the mutual will to continue promoting exchange in areas of common interest, and a greater access for Cuba to new forms of cooperation, such as non-refundable aid in areas such as health, agriculture, energy and transport. This year, we also look forward to the inauguration of the Japan International Cooperation Agency office in Havana and the attendance of top leaders of the agency and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There is also continued interest among Japanese tourists in visiting Cuba, drawn as they are by our natural scenery, authentic culture and historic heritage. The Japanese visitor will find in Cuba a happy, educated and hospitable people, ready to greet them with open arms.

In terms of our national development,

Cuba will continue to strive for the construction of a socialist, democratic, prosperous and sustainable society, despite having to endure an economic blockade condemned annually by the U.N. since 1991, as well as the difficulties derived from the current global economy and the distortion of the Cuban reality by the mass media.

I wish to express once again the special gratitude felt by the Cuban people for the traditional show of solidarity of friendship organizations, members of parliament, political parties and the Japanese society as a whole.

We Cubans have the outmost confidence that 2018 will be a year for strengthening the relations between our countries and that our future will be as bright as the sun that shines upon our homelands.



Left: Cayo Guillermo has beautiful beaches and crystal clear waters; Above: baseball is Cuba's national sport. CUBAN EMBASSY

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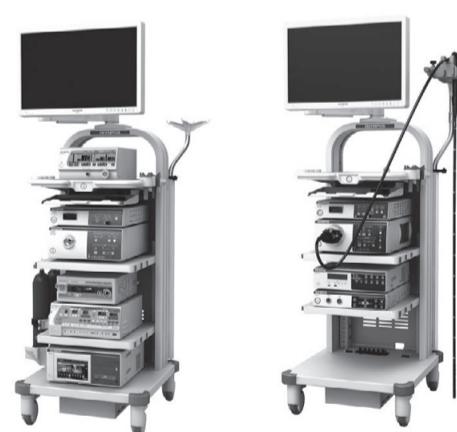
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