

Nigeria Independence Day Special

Keen interest in bolstering relationships in many areas

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AMBASSADOR OF NIGERIA



ans residing in Japan.

I arrived Tokyo with my family on June 23 as the new ambassador to Japan. Today, Oct. 1, is Nigeria's national day — the day the country secured its independence from its colonial masters. It is interesting to note that today also marks the 61st anniversary of Nigeria-Japan diplomatic relations. The day is also special to me because it marks 100 days of my stewardship in Japan as the new head of mission in the embassy. These 100 days have been eventful for me, notwithstanding the restrictions occasioned by the highly commended efforts of host authorities to fight the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

I presented the copie d'usage of my letter of credence to the vice minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on July 12. The subsequent presentation of my letter of credence to His Majesty Emperor Naruhito at the Imperial Palace Aug. 27, marked the official commencement of my representational duty in Japan.

I assured the emperor of my resolve to

strengthen and deepen the existing cordial relations between our countries during my tenure. I specifically assured him that I would work for the promotion of closer friendly relations between our two countries in the areas of trade, economics, investment, culture and security, among others.

It is also noteworthy that, within these 100 days, I have met with the leadership of the Nigerian Union in Japan, the Nigeria Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan and the Nigerians in Diaspora Organization. In addition to the briefings I received from officers in the embassy when I arrived, and my engagements with these organizations, I am happy to observe that most Nigerians residing in Japan are projecting the image of Nigeria in the host country positively. This has further strengthened my resolve to express keen interest in the welfare of Nigerians in Japan. Interestingly, during this period, 140 passports were issued and I did not receive any negative report from Nigerians who visited the embassy for passport issues and consular services.

The positive image for Nigeria in Japan was further consolidated by the brilliant performance of Team Nigeria, who participated at the recently concluded 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games that belatedly started in July and ended in early September. Team Nigeria was led by the Honorable Minister of Youth and Sports Development Sunday Dare, along with the former Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Youth and Sports Nebolisa Anako and the President of the Nigeria Olympic Com-

mittee (NOC) Habu Gumel. I met each of the athletes during their stay in Kisarazu, Chiba Prefecture, to receive and welcome them, attend to their welfare, address their challenges and encourage them to perform excellently at the games.

In the end, they made us proud. Nigeria participated in 10 Olympic sports: athletics, rowing, swimming, basketball (men's and women's), table tennis (men's and women's), taekwondo, badminton, wrestling, canoeing and powerlifting. We won two medals at the Games — one silver and one bronze. Afterward, the embassy arranged a reception for the youth and sports minister, officials of the ministry, NOC officials, the athletes and the medalists. Afterward, Nigeria participated in the Paralympic Games with 22 Paralympians in four sports — table tennis, powerlifting, athletics and rowing. In the end, Nigeria won 10 medals consisting of four golds, one silver and five bronze.

Notwithstanding the cheery news, there is no hiding the fact I assumed office at a very critical time during which the coronavirus pandemic had impeded socioeconomic activities and affected the smooth running of official engagements. At the embassy, we have employed various measures to adhere to the COVID-19 protocols instituted by the host government. I wish to sincerely thank the government of Japan for facilitating the vaccination of our officers and staff and for their steadfastness in the fight against the dreaded virus.

One important conclusion I have reached based on my engagements with govern-

ment officials in Tokyo during this period is that Japan is keenly interested in strengthening bilateral relations with Nigeria by according greater attention to issues that affect our two countries, with greater vigor and enthusiasm. I am happy to note that this period has opened a new vista in the bilateral relations between Nigeria and Japan.

The embassy is strongly committed to this, too. In this light, it is my pleasure to report that Nigeria supported Japan's candidate, Metoki Masahiko, in his successful appointment as director-general of the International Postal Union during the election on Aug. 25. We shall continue to demonstrate our commitment to improve on the existing relations between both countries in all ramifications and in the spirit of reciprocity.

Our policy on visas is liberal enough to attract business communities from Japan to Nigeria. In the past 100 days, there was an increase in visa applications that were processed by the embassy and 61 biometric visas were issued during the period. This is an indication of the Japanese business community's renewed interest in engaging in trade and investment with Nigeria, despite the pandemic.

To further express my commitment to strengthen diplomatic, economic and trade relations with Japan, I had meetings with top government functionaries and senior officials of some important organizations. Strategic decisions were reached during these meetings. The officials I visited included the minister of economy, trade

and industry; the director-general of African affairs at the Foreign Ministry; and the chief of the Japan External Trade Organization. Many others are in the pipeline, including the CEO of Toyota Tsusho Corp. and the chairman of Honda Motor Co.

In addition, I participated in a seminar organized by NEC Corp. and held meetings with the CEO of NS Semicon Co., officials of the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry, as well as top officials of Itochu Corp. and Albanex Co. I also plan to pay a visit to the president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) this month. The embassy also participated in the opening of two bids at JICA on behalf of Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Power and the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control. Indeed, I believe that in due course we shall begin to see the fruitful results of our engagements with all these and other organizations in Japan.

It is equally important to add that within these past 100 days, I visited the dean of the diplomatic corps and the ambassador of San Marino in Japan; the dean of the African Diplomatic Corps and the ambassador of Eritrea; the dean of the Economic Community of West African States and the ambassador of Cote d'Ivoire; and the nine ambassadors from the ECOWAS countries accredited to Japan, to pay homage to them, register my presence in Japan and seek their cooperation during my tenure.

I have appeared in some Japanese and Nigerian-based media organizations, including the Nigerian Television Authority, other electronic and print media in Nigeria and the Nikkei newspaper and



The Abuja Central Business District, also known as Central Area, was designed for the Federal Capital Territory by renowned Japanese architect Kenzo Tange in 1981.

EMBASSY OF NIGERIA

The Japan Times. My responses to the different interviews I granted explain the path I intend to navigate to move relations between Nigeria and Japan to a new level during my tenure.

In conclusion, I would like to seize the occasion of the 61st independence anniversary of our country to reassure Nigerians residing in Japan that the embassy will continue to improve in demonstrating its interest in their welfare. In that light, I would like to count on their support to achieve the aspirations before me as ambassador of Nigeria to Japan at this time. I would also like to thank the government and people of Japan; the Foreign Ministry and indeed, all those who sent messages of goodwill to our embassy on the occasion of the 61st independence anniversary of Nigeria.

Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria and long live Japan.

Thank you and may God bless all of us.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.



Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in Abuja. EMBASSY OF NIGERIA

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on the Anniversary of
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