

Jamaica Independence Message 2007

On the occasion of the 45th anniversary of Jamaica's Independence, I have the honour to extend greetings to their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan and very best wishes to all the members of the Imperial Household.

As we mark this important milestone, it is a privilege to share with the readers of the Japan Times some thoughts on the state of bilateral relations between Jamaica and Japan and to mention other points of interest which have shaped Jamaica's political and economic landscape over the past year.

Friendship with Japan

Over the past year, Jamaica and Japan have continued to enjoy close ties of friendship, cooperation, trade and investment, while a series of cultural events and people-to-people contacts have enhanced mutual understanding and brought our two countries closer together.

Japan remains the leading market for the export of Jamaica's Blue Mountain Coffee beans, importing roughly 80 per cent of Jamaica's total production with a value of approximately \$19 million in 2005. Japan's exports to Jamaica in the same year were valued at approximately \$123 million.

The Japan Education and Teaching (JET) Programme continues to be a wonderful medium of cultural exchange between Jamaica and Japan, with some 45 teachers participating in the programme in 2006. Numerous other Jamaicans are engaged at schools and colleges throughout Japan as English teachers.

The One Love Jamaica Festival was staged for the third time in Yoyogi Park Tokyo and attracted a record crowd of over 40,000 visitors to the two-day event held 19-20 May 2007. The event underlined the enthusiastic following for Jamaica's reggae music and culture among the Japanese public and was a demonstration of the harmony and goodwill in the relations between the peoples of both countries. Several other Jamaican festivals and musical events were held in Japan over the past year, featuring performances by leading Jamaican reggae and dancehall artistes.

Jamaica values highly the ties of cooperation with Japan. We continue to benefit from the provision of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the form of loans, grants and technical assistance. According to the Official White Paper on ODA published by Japan, there was a net transfer of \$17.94 million from Jamaica to Japan in 2005 due to the repayment of loans made in previous years. As far as grant aid is concerned, a total of \$120,000 was received in 2005, while technical cooperation was valued at \$3.27 million, mainly in the provision of expert training from the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) and from the training of Jamaicans in Japan in various fields.

Economic Growth and Investment Flows

Jamaica has seen sustained flows of foreign and domestic investment for the past five years and this has helped to underline our position as the most flexible and resilient economy in the Caribbean.

New capital expenditure in Jamaica's mining sector has contributed to a record performance in the production of bauxite and alumina. In 2006, bauxite and alumina accounted for two-thirds of all merchandise exports and one-third of Jamaica's total exports of goods and services. Bauxite production grew by 5.3 per cent to 14.865 million tonnes and alumina output amounted to 4.1 million tonnes, the highest levels ever achieved. This contributed to an overall increase of 17 per cent in gross export earnings which totalled \$1.19 billion from this sector.

Tourism continues to be a vibrant component of the Jamaican economy. Fourteen major hotels are being constructed over the next five years, and this will increase the stock of rooms by fifty per cent and bring the total close to 30,000 by 2012. By comparison, in 1986 there were only 8,800 hotel rooms in Jamaica. In 2006 the number of visitors to the island surpassed the 3 million mark for the first time. This was made possible by the significant expansion of the two international airports at Montego Bay and Kingston and by the expansion and upgrading programmes to cruise shipping facilities in Montego Bay and Ocho Rios. Two years ago Jamaica was named the Leading Cruise Destination in the Caribbean. In 2006 we won the award for the Leading Cruise Destination in the World. Jamaican hotels have also won many global awards, including for best all-inclusives and best villas.

The attractiveness of Jamaica's investment climate has also been appreciated in Japan. The Marubeni Corporation has declared its interest in acquiring an 80 per cent stake in the Jamaica Public Service Company (electricity generation), at a value of \$365 million. When combined with the Japanese investments in Jamaica's coffee sector, the Marubeni investment will make Jamaica one of the leading destinations for Japanese investment in the Caribbean and Latin America.

These developments have occurred against the backdrop of an overall growth in GDP of 2.5 per cent in 2006, an inflation rate of 5.8 per cent, the lowest in thirty years, an unemployment rate of 9.6 per cent, the lowest rate in history, and an increase of 15.9 per cent in agricultural production. At the same time Jamaica and other countries of the Caribbean Community hosted the Cricket World Cup in 2007, one of the largest sporting contests in the world, and its success was a clear demonstration of the capacity of small states to host major sporting and other events.

Improvements in Infrastructure

The boom in local and foreign investment in Jamaica has been fuelled in large part by the emphasis placed by the Government on the country's physical infrastructure. Over the last five years more than \$700 million has been invested in telecommunications infrastructure with another \$100 million to come on stream for the creation of submarine fibre-optic links. Jamaicans now have greater access to new technology than at any time in our history, thanks to the digital transformation of our country

through the provision of advanced broadband networks, new and emerging wireless technology and next generation digital communication services and devices.

The Highway 2000 Project is the largest and most significant infrastructure project ever undertaken in Jamaica. Together with the North Coast Highway Project, the aim is to build a modern tolled-motorway linking Kingston, the capital with critical urban centres throughout the country. The total length of the project is approximately 230 kilometres, a significant portion of which has already been constructed.

The expansion programme at the Port of Kingston has also yielded impressive results. The Kingston Container Terminal has moved from a ranking of 62nd to its current ranking of 55th among the top 100 transshipment ports in the world. The present transshipment capacity of 1.5 million TEUs will increase to 3.2 million TEUs by the end of 2007, following the completion of Phase 5 of the expansion project.

Emancipation, Independence and Democracy

The year 2007 is of particular significance to Jamaica as in addition to the 45th Anniversary of our Independence, we are also marking the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Trade in Africans and the holding of the 15th general election since the introduction of Universal Adult Suffrage in 1944.

Although not widely known in Japan, the slave trade was an atrocity of global proportions that altered the course of human history and transformed the economic, social, racial and cultural landscape on four continents. It has been described by the United Nations as one of the worst violations of human rights in the history of humanity.

In the case of Jamaica, over one million of our West African ancestors were torn from their homeland and taken through the repulsive and inhuman Middle Passage to our shores. Out of their pain and struggle was born the Jamaican identity with its legacy of strength, courage, creativity and resilience. In 2007 we commemorate the gallantry, heroism and tenacity of our ancestors and honour the price they paid for the privilege we enjoy today as free, independent Jamaicans.

The Way Forward

While earlier generations of Jamaicans fought for fundamental freedoms and political self-determination and helped to entrench Jamaica's solid democratic tradition, it is now the turn of the current generation to build on this tradition and achieve economic and social development. In pursuit of this goal, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller has commissioned a long-term development plan to take Jamaica to developed country status by 2030 and has called on the nation to unite around the theme "One Jamaica, One Family, Shaping the Future Together". Jamaica 2030 is based on the vision to make Jamaica the place of choice to raise families and do business, while preserving our citizens' rights and freedoms. The aim is to create an environment for people to realise their full potential through the generation of opportunities for

wealth and job creation, the development of human and physical capital, the promotion of exports and the advancement of research and technology.

Conclusion

In closing, I wish to extend my appreciation to the many Jamaicans and friends of Jamaica in Japan who have contributed so much to the promotion of the ties of friendship and cooperation between Jamaica and Japan. I am particularly grateful to Mr. Takeo Hiranuma, Chairman of the Japan-Jamaica Parliamentary Friendship League, Mr. Tatsushi Ueshima, Honorary Consul of Jamaica in Kobe, Mr. Hiroshi Sato, Chairman of the Japan Used Motor Vehicles Exporters Association, and Mr. Ryuichi Tsuruno, Chairman of the One Love Festival Organizing Committee, who have all extended the hand of friendship to Jamaica over the past year.

I am grateful also to the Jamaican JET participants, the Association of Jamaicans in Japan (AJJ), the Association of Japanese Importers of Jamaican Coffee, the Japan-Jamaica Society, the One Love Jamaica Festival Committee, the Jamaica Tourist Board and all the stakeholders in the Jamaica/Japan tourism travel trade, and finally, to the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Association for the fine work that they do to promote our region in Japan and to contribute to various charitable causes in our countries.

Embassy of Jamaica
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