

Bilateral friendship has potential for worldwide influence

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On this day, May 28, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia celebrates its 16th National Day amid warm congratulations from abroad. This day of celebration sparked friendly discussions over the formation of the Japan-Ethiopia Friendship Union, and as such, congratulations should be sent not only to the citizens of Ethiopia, but to all those members of the Diet who have been participating in this process for a great length of time.



Beginning with the legend of King Solomon, which has its beginnings in the Old Testament, to the appearance of the Queen of Sheba, Ethiopia's independent-minded culture and history has captured the imaginations of countless people for over 3,000 years.

Furthermore, as the Japanese have a similar tradition of pride and cultural unity, which has maintained continued independence throughout history, the result is that many Japanese people cannot hide their deep sense of respect for Ethiopia.

In the Japanese mind, the first remembrance of this familiar sense of pride occurred during the track and field events of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. The Ethiopian team achieved glory and re-

spect with competitors such as Mesereto Dehvaru, who won the gold medal in the women's 5,000 meters, and Abebe Bikila, winner of the Olympic marathon. Both athletes showed unsurpassed Olympic excellence.

During that period in his life, Bikila earned much admiration that did not diminish at his death, and the image of that brave figure has been etched in the consciousness of many Japanese as an eternal Ethiopian hero.

Japan's first bonds with Ethiopia were forged in 1927 with the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship, marking the beginning of peaceable relations between the two countries. This year marks the 80th anniversary of that treaty, truly a time for commemoration and remembrance. The relationship between Japan and Ethiopia is intact, despite a short discontinuance during World War II. The 80-year friendship has proven a fortunate experience for both countries.

Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie visited Japan in 1956, thereby cementing a deep bond of friendship between the two countries. In addition, Their Majesties, the Emperor and Empress led a royal delegation to Ethiopia in 1960, further tying together the two countries.

The links between Japanese and Ethiopians run deep, with a long history of friendship, but as the 21st century progresses, a time has come when both countries need to redefine their cooperative relationship. Recently Japan, in order to realize its full economic potential and to have its contributions recognized by the international community, needs to ensure that these contributions are used in peaceful development for all mankind and has the assured cooperation of those international societies.

Japan's relations with the countries in the African Union, which are blessed with rich natural resources, hold an equally rich

and important future. Ethiopia is a member of the AU, and the capital is Addis Ababa, or "new flower," which functions as an especially important symbol in the AU, acting as a leader for these African countries to emulate.

When I visited Ethiopia in 1985, I experienced and witnessed a nation having difficulty in effectively eliminating the suffering of the country's refugees. After that visit, Japan's and Ethiopia's names were linked in such a fashion that the bond between the nations would help push Ethiopia to new stages of opportunity, which I did notice happening on a second visit to that country.

The scenery may change every time you visit, but when you see a place, constantly modernizing and progressing, one cannot but help gasp in admiration and feel respect for a country that possesses such a palpable, powerful essence, and you witness before you a land of unlimited possibility.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited the Ethiopian capital in 2006, a first for a Japanese leader, and met Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to discuss mutual cooperation. One point of importance discussed was not to allow the hindrances of the past century to impinge on the 21st century. The boundaries created by race and religion must be cast aside to perpetuate a continuing maturation of the Japanese-Ethiopian bond, uniting and striving for a platform of agreement on such issues as energy and the environment. This agreement will not only foster a

stronger relationship of friendship, which is already warm between these two countries, but a friendship that is not only mutually beneficial, but one that benefits all of mankind. An old expression of "seeing is believing" prevails in Asian culture.

Firsthand observations of the physical presentations of history, combined with sharing traditional cultures, allow a warm, mutual understanding to develop between two nations. More importantly, for the citizens of these countries, such a valuable experience is indeed a rare occurrence and the experience is difficult to replace or emulate. This sensation was born between myself and Ethiopia during my first visit in 1985, and can be experienced by all the citizens of both countries sharing with one another.

Visiting a similar country leads to mutual contact and the opportunity for understanding is increased. Moreover, this shared contact bridges the hearts, affections and thoughts of peoples living on different sides of the globe. Asia and Africa are showing that the path of intimate friendship is truly a beneficial course for nations to endeavor upon.

Japan's and Ethiopia's friendship-related development shows the world a positive display of understanding and respect, and is warmly embraced by both these nations, marking this 16th National Day for Ethiopia a day for celebration.