

Grass-roots exchanges bolster ties

By SADAU UMEDA

President Ethiopian Association of Japan

On behalf of the Ethiopian Association of Japan, I would like to extend our sincere congratulations to the people and government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on the memorable occasion of the 16th anniversary of Ethiopian National Day and the auspicious Third Millennium Year in the Ethiopian calendar, starting Sept. 12.



With a 36-year history, our association has promoted people-to-people exchanges aiming for the betterment of bilateral relations as well as world peace. Members who love Ethiopia have kept developing goodwill activities, such as a scholarship program, fundraising for flood victims who were attacked last summer in eastern and southern parts of Ethiopia, and cultural, academic and economic exchanges through an active human network.

As for the scholarship program, we have supported 45 university students studying in Ethiopia to date since we started the scheme in 2001. Many students have shown their sincere appreciation to us by graduating with distinction and being awarded a medal for being first in each faculty. When our representatives visited Ethiopia this

February, they were happy to have a luncheon meeting and exchange views with those scholarship students. Kinichi Komano, Japan's ambassador to Ethiopia, Mahdi Ahmed Gadid, director general of Asia and Australasia at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ethiopia, and the association's local members also attended the lunch.

We discovered that our small but hearty financial support makes the students feel that there is somebody who lives thousands of kilometers away, who cares about their dreams and shares their views.

It is our wish that these educated youth will assume leadership roles in Ethiopia in the future, and eradicate poverty as their first task.

Academic exchanges are setting the pace among universities, too. The University of Tokushima in Shikoku and Gondar University in Ethiopia are going to conclude an academic agreement soon on joint research in the fields of health bioscience such as micronutrients and HIV/tuberculosis, and socio-techno science, like environmental analysis.

Keio University has long been engaged in the restoration of wall pictures at hidden rock churches in Tigray, in the northern part of Ethiopia, and is also involved in urban planning in other regions of the country. Their work resulted in opening classes at local universities on the same architecture of Ethiopia as studied at Keio University by

sending their lecturers from Japan. Our association is supporting their academic activities as much as possible.

It was encouraging to witness that "Ethiopian Night for Cuisine and Dance," our popular annual event, attracted 400 participants to its 35th anniversary edition last October.

Programs covered cultural exchanges of colorful traditions of both countries, such as Ethiopian cuisine, the coffee ceremony and Ethiopian dance, and Japanese dance, koto music and an exciting karate display.

On this festive occasion, certificates of commendation were awarded to six corporate members and 48 individual members who have supported our association for between 10 and 33 years, and contributed so much to its success.

Last year, Girma Birr Geda, minister of trade and industry, and Dr. Tekeda Alemu, state minister of foreign affairs, visited Japan. We hosted a welcome dinner and enjoyed talks with them. We are delighted that the bilateral relationship has been deepened and is getting stronger every year through these valuable people-to-people exchanges.

We hope to see the further development of Ethiopia through the strong ties.

I sincerely wish Ethiopia every success in its quest for prosperity and stability.