

TAKESHI IWAYA: Japan and SA – advancing global development through partnership

Priority issues at this year's G20, to be held in SA, are also significant areas of focus for Japan

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Picture: REUTERS/TORU HANAI

As I travel to SA to attend the G20 foreign ministers' meeting, I do so with a deep sense of anticipation.

This marks my first visit to the African continent as foreign affairs minister of Japan. I look forward to experiencing first-hand the energy and dynamism of this vibrant nation.

It is encouraging to see the government of national unity, formed after the general elections in May last year, steering national governance in a way that reflects the diverse voices of the people under the leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Japan and SA are important partners that share fundamental values and principles such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The challenges facing the international community today cannot be resolved by any one country alone. It is essential to pool knowledge and technological expertise to develop new solutions together. In this effort, co-operation between Japan and SA is more important than ever.

Under the theme "Solidarity, Equality & Sustainability" the SA government, as the G20 presidency, has prioritised the development of developing countries, particularly in Africa.

About 30 years ago Japan took the lead globally in emphasising ownership by African countries and partnership with the international community by launching the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (Ticad), a framework for African development.

This August, Ticad 9 will be held in Yokohama, bringing together leaders from African countries and Japan. Ticad 9, with “co-creation” as a keyword, will build on Japan’s previous efforts to create solutions to various challenges together with African countries. By fostering synergy between the G20 and Ticad Japan is committed to actively contributing to discussions to maximise their combined impact.



Takeshi Iwaya, Japanese minister for foreign affairs.
Picture: SUPPLIED

Furthermore, the priority issues in this year’s G20 – disaster resilience, debt sustainability, a just energy transition and critical minerals – are also significant areas of focus for Japan. In particular, disaster resilience is an area where Japan, having faced numerous natural disasters, can offer valuable insights to the world through its extensive experience and knowledge. In addition, Japan remains fully committed to co-operating to promote transparent and fair development finance to maintain debt sustainability.

In today’s rapidly changing international landscape, Japan and SA, which have built a strong relationship based on friendship and trust, must work hand-in-hand to guide the world from “division and confrontation” towards “dialogue and co-operation.”

Today, many Japanese companies have expanded into SA, contributing to its technological innovation and economic development through investment and job creation. The presence of about 260 Japanese corporate offices in SA is the highest in Africa, contributing to about 150,000 jobs.

Our economic ties are also deepening through trade, with SA agricultural products benefited by the country’s rich natural environment. Rooibos tea and avocados, which have gained popularity in Japan due to rising health consciousness, are prime examples. We aim to strengthen co-operation to further expand Japan-SA economic relations.

High-level exchanges between SA and Japan are increasing. In July 2023 then-foreign minister Hayashi Yoshimasa visited SA as the G7 chair. SA international relations & co-operation minister Ronald Lamola visited Japan in August last year, shortly after assuming office, to participate in the Ticad ministerial meeting, where he held talks with then-foreign minister Yōko Kamikawa.

Last December, SA electricity & energy minister Kgosientsho Ramokgopa visited Japan, further deepening co-operation in the energy sector based on the memorandum of co-operation on hydrogen and ammonia signed in 2023.

As foreign minister of Japan, I am determined to engage in broad discussions through such exchanges and to deepen co-operation so that the people of Japan and SA can mutually enjoy the benefits of prosperity.

Exchanges between our two countries also shine on the sports stage, with about 40 SA rugby players now playing in Japanese teams. The sight of these athletes from both countries wearing the same uniform and competing together, united by mutual respect, is a true symbol of friendship.

Furthermore, the Japan exchange & teaching programme has welcomed over 900 young South Africans, who have contributed to English education in Japan while serving as cultural bridges between our two nations.

The bonds forged through such multilayered exchanges continue to be a driving force shaping a brighter future for both countries.

As I embark on this visit I look forward to meeting with minister Lamola and engaging with the people of SA. I am committed to further strengthening the excellent bilateral relations between Japan and SA and co-operating towards the success of the G20 under SA's presidency.

· *Iwaya is Japanese minister for foreign affairs.*