

Prime Minister Abe's Speech
on the occasion of Banquet hosted by President of Cote d'Ivoire

His Excellency Mr. Alassane Ouattara, President of Cote d'Ivoire,

I would like to thank you most sincerely for inviting many of our mutual friends to this occasion.

Your Excellencies,

It has been a little more than a half year since we cultivated our friendship at TICAD V. I couldn't be any happier to see you again.

Today, I am extremely honored to have been awarded a wonderful decoration together with my wife, here in front of you.

This year is the FIFA World Cup Year. It is Cote d'Ivoire that Japan will compete in its first match.

I am told that Cote d'Ivoire is a country of "Hospitality". Japan is second to none when it comes to "Hospitality".

By a curious coincidence, both countries, one representing "Hospitality" in Asia and the other representing it in Africa, turned out to have a showdown in the World Cup.

President Ouattara,

Let's promise each other right now. On June 14th, no matter which team wins, Japan and Cote d'Ivoire will praise each other for their performance. What do you think, President?

I also wish Ghana and Nigeria the best of luck for their performance in the World Cup.

I felt obliged to come to West Africa earlier than any other countries. As I set foot on Francophone West Africa, I would like to pick up on the breath of integration through all my five physical senses and bring it home.

West Africa is endowed with untapped resources and rich agriculture with the population of 300 million people equivalent to twice the size of that of Japan. It seems that West Africa begins to fulfill its great potential all at once in solidarity under ECOWAS.

I would like to see, listen and feel it and then pass along it to Japanese people. I would also like to play my role in conveying West Africa to Japan together with my wife Akie, as well as accompanying Japanese business leaders. That is the reason why I wanted to visit West Africa earlier than any other countries.

I have already decided my souvenirs. I will collect several types of CFA franc, your single currency pegged to Euro, and bring them home.

I will take some pictures of them and upload them on my Facebook. I hope that Japanese people will take an immediate interest in West Africa.

Solidarity makes one stronger. That is simple yet strong message that ECOWAS teaches the world.

We have a deep respect for the efforts that you have made for stabilizing the Sahel region.

Japan would like to walk with you, and in that spirit, we are ready to provide US\$ 83.40 million amount of assistance for the Sahel region.

In particular, Cote d'Ivoire is undergoing remarkable recovery

after the conflict under the leadership of President Ouattara. A sign of economic recovery indeed symbolizes the energy of West Africa itself. This is the reason why I wanted to visit this country first in the region.

I recall one thing. In 1970, when Japan hosted the World Expo in Osaka, Cote d'Ivoire made its own pavilion which was ivory shaped and pure white. Cote d'Ivoire proudly appealed to the world in Japan that it had the future with potential.

If there were to be limitations for 15 ECOWAS countries, it must be only the blue sky. In retrospect, the design of that pavilion that stuck out of the blue sky went ahead of the future.

I hear that “Solidarity, discipline, diligence” are national virtues. These three virtues sound just right for Japanese people.

The blue sky goes on forever in the future that lies ahead of Japan, West Africa and their future. I intend to keep my mind on that from now on.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.