

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida's article contributed to REFORMA, Mexico
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President Enrique Peña Nieto and Mrs. Angélica Rivera de Peña recently paid an Official Working Visit to Japan from April 7 to 10, at the invitation of the Government of Japan. During the visit, President Peña Nieto referred to Japan and Mexico as “fraternal countries” and noted that the people of Mexico have enduring respect for the people of Japan. As a Japanese national there was no greater joy for me to hear these words of affection for Japan and the Japanese people spoken by President Peña Nieto.

Mexico is a country that has widened the horizons of Japanese diplomacy, being the first to conclude diplomatic treaty on equal terms with Japan, the first systematic destination of Japanese immigrants and one of the first countries to conclude an economic partnership agreement (EPA) with Japan. Accordingly, Mexico is a strategic base for Japan's diplomacy towards the Latinamerican and the Caribbean region.

I am convinced that the recent visit to Japan by President Peña Nieto has opened a new page in the long history of goodwill and cooperation between our two nations, which stretches back over 400 years.

In the same way that the people of Mexico hold the people of Japan in high regard, the people of Japan have a deep and abiding affection for the people of Mexico.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation for the countless messages of solidarity and the extraordinary support extended by the people and the Government of Mexico after the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Mexico was the only Latin American country to dispatch an emergency relief team to Japan, and I believe that the sight of this team engaged in various assistance activities amidst snowstorms exemplified the bonds we share as “fraternal countries.”

Mexico is today a globally important manufacturing and export center for the Japanese automobile industry. In the first half of 2012, Japan became the largest investor in Mexico. Furthermore, bilateral trade has reached a record high against the backdrop of the Japan-Mexico EPA. Such increases in bilateral trade and investment have contributed to the Mexican economy in the form of employment creation and technological transfers. In addition, the two countries actively utilize triangular

cooperation to support other Latin American countries, mainly in the environment and disaster management.

In Latin America, including Mexico, democracy has firmly taken root and the region is regarded as a growth center of the global economy along with Asia.

Sharing as we do basic values such as democracy and the rule of law, Latin America is regarded by Japan as an important partner in the international community. Japan and Latin America are engaged in close cooperation in responding to various global challenges including climate change, disarmament and non-proliferation.

Including in the realm of economic relations, Latin America is a partner with which we will develop together, as Japan strives to revitalize its economy. Latin America has a growing market, with a population of 600 million people, and is also an important supplier of mineral and food resources to Japan. Many Japanese companies have expanded to Latin America, with the number of Japanese companies in Mexico increasing by approximately 160 over the last five years. Japanese companies seek to develop together with the people of the countries in which they do business. By transferring advanced technologies and sharing business expertise with the local population, Japanese companies are contributing to the mid- to long-term development of the countries of Latin America.

The timing of my visit coincides with the commemorative anniversary of the mission headed by the samurai Hasekura Tsunenaga, who set sail from Japan to Latin America 400 years ago. The Hasekura Tsunenaga mission sought to open up trade with Mexico. Subsequently, over the course of the last 400 years, the spirit of Hasekura has been passed down through generations of Japanese immigrants to Latin America, and more recently through the Japanese companies that have entered the region, further deepening the bonds of friendship that we share.

For Japan, Mexico is an important neighbor across the Pacific Ocean with which we share more than a 400-year history of friendship and cooperation. The two countries are also strategic global partners that share responsibility for maintaining and strengthening international order. Let us all make persistent efforts to further solidify our unshakable ties established by our forefathers to ensure that future generations in both countries can also take pride in our “singular bond” of friendship and cooperation.