

Togolese teak helps residents in Tohoku town

Twenty-six benches made of Togolese teak were brought to the town of Yamamoto, Miyagi Prefecture, last week.

In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, the International Tropical Timber Organization, the only United Nations intergovernmental organization based in Japan, called for support in reconstructing quake- and tsunami-hit areas.

The government of the Republic of Togo responded to the call, offering 37 cu. meters of teak.

Togo is a country with a tropical climate, located in West Africa, with a population of about 6.6 million. Teak is one of the country's major exports.

In June 2011, three months after the earthquake, Togolese President Faure Gnassingbe came to Japan to visit the people in the devastated areas and expressed the solidarity of the Togolese people.

The donated teak was received by the Japan Youth Lumbermen's Association (JYLA)



Helping hand: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Steve Aklesso Bodjona of Togo meets residents of a temporary housing site in Yamamoto, Miyagi Prefecture, on May 14, when benches and toys made of Togolese teak are donated. JAPAN YOUTH LUMBERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

through the introduction of the Forestry Agency. JYLA set up the Togo Teak Project for 3.11 Reconstruction Assistance and produced more than 200 benches that make use of the

special characteristics of the wood, which is durable, allowing for extended outdoor use. The benches will be distributed free to the temporary housing sites and parks in the devastated

areas, aiming to be of some help in reviving local communities and providing places of relief.

Also, some 100 pieces of wooden toy animals were created using the off cuts from the timber.

On May 14, an official presentation ceremony took place in Yamamoto.

Yamamoto Mayor Toshio Saito welcomed Togolese Charge d'Affaires a.i. Steve Aklesso Bodjona and expressed the town's gratitude to the government and people of Togo. During the ceremony, Bodjona delivered a speech in Japanese saying that it is the Togolese people's expression of solidarity featuring African culture and it would be a sheer pleasure if they could be of some help for the residents in the devastated areas.

The benches will also be delivered to Higasimatsushima and Watari in Miyagi Prefecture, as well as other cities in the affected region.

For more information, visit www.facebook.com/TogoTeakProject.