



South African Chamber of Commerce in Japan Joins JMEC

Text **NAOKO IWAMOTO**

JMEC is pleased to welcome the South African Chamber of Commerce in Japan (SACCJ) on board as a new member of JMEC—and the very first chamber to join from the African continent. This means that JMEC is now supported by 18 chambers of commerce representing all five continents.

To introduce the SACCJ and its activities to the JMEC community—I caught up with **Jaco Minnaar**, SACCJ Chair, and **Jennifer Sakaguchi**, SACCJ Vice Chair, over coffee on a cool December evening in Tokyo.



South Africa – celebrating its 20th anniversary of democracy

For South Africa 2014 is an important year—as the country celebrates its 20th anniversary of democracy. Following decades of apartheid and the release of Nelson Mandela from political imprisonment—the country's first democratic elections took place in 1994, with Mandela elected President.

As part of the anniversary celebrations, SACCJ recently held an event called **South Africa-Japan Innovation in Business Forum** in Tokyo—co-hosted with the South African Embassy. The event attracted a few hundred attendants from businesses in Japan and South Africa—doing or interested in doing business between the two countries as well as with other African nations.

Gateway to Africa

Borrowing the key phrase from the Forum—South Africa is the “*gateway to Africa*” for many international companies, says Jaco. While trading businesses involved in natural resources—such as gold, platinum (South Africa is the world #1 platinum producer), titanium, uranium and diamonds are most attracted to South Africa—wine production (world #9) and food trading, as well as tourism, also account for important parts of the country’s economy.



Swartland Vineyards at Dusk Photo:WOSA

In terms of South African exports, Japan is the country’s 3rd largest trading partner.

3 main pillars of SACCJ activities

SACCJ was founded in August 2006 and as such, is still a young organization compared to other larger chambers in Tokyo, says Jennifer. In 2006, former ambassador Dr. Ben Ngubane felt there was a need for a South African chamber of commerce—and knocked on the doors of corporations which already had trading relationships with South Africa, and persuaded them to form the SACCJ.

Back then, and the following few years after its foundation, the SACCJ’s main pursuits were socializing and networking—rather than business related activities. Having grown substantially as a chamber in recent years, explained Jaco—the SACCJ now has three main types of activities:

- 1) **Business Events.** Business related events are something the SACCJ will focus more on in the future—starting with the Forum mentioned above, which was the biggest business event ever for the Chamber. Further activities are planned with the purpose of facilitating and increasing business between the two countries, mainly in Japan.
- 2) **Social Events.** There are many fun social activities in the SACCJ community—from the annual Gala Christmas Party, wine and cheese parties; and “braai”, South African barbeque—to monthly pub nights.
- 3) **Giving Back to Community.** In 2014 SACCJ completed a charity project which raised ¥440,000 to purchase a quilting sewing machine for the *Two Sisters*—an HIV orphanage charity in South Africa—to help them generate additional income. After the project was completed, the Chamber decided to continue this charity initiative. The SACCJ Board members are now looking into organizations—both locally in Japan and internationally, through which they can give back to the community.



SACCJ - a volunteer organization

This interview was held at the offices of Rio Tinto Japan, an SACCJ corporate member—as the Chamber currently has no physical office space of its own. It is run by a group of volunteer professionals who all have full-time jobs. The Board has five directors and one Secretary General—representing nationals from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, America and Canada.



H.E. Ambassador Mohau N. Pheko

One nationality is missing, however—Japan; but the Chamber is actively seeking to find a Japanese to join the Board. SACCJ aims to grow to the point where a full-time staff can be employed within a few years.

Strategic alliance with JMEC

According to Jennifer, one of the founding SACCJ Board members—the Chamber was approached to join JMEC not long after its establishment in 2006. However, it was not quite ready and opted not to join at the time—having just started up and trying to put together its first series of activities.

Since then, and now in its seventh year—the Chamber has grown significantly in size and extent of activities. So when the current JMEC Program Director (and a South African wine enthusiast!) recently approached them—the Board felt that “it was now natural to join the JMEC community”, according to Jaco and Jennifer. They were also attracted to the idea that by joining, the SACCJ would help JMEC become represented by chambers of commerce in Japan from all five continents—with the most recent prior chamber to join being the Brazilian Chamber, as the first JMEC chamber representing South America.



Cyril Desgraand
JMEC Representative

Jaco looks upon JMEC as a strategic alliance partner for the SACCJ—through which its members can benefit in a number of ways—by associating with the many interesting companies and individuals in the JMEC community, as well as potential JMEC project clients, sponsors or program participants. In recent years an increasing number of companies have been sending employees to the program, paid for by the companies—due to the very unique multi-cultural and hands-on training that JMEC provides.

The SACCJ Board of Directors has also come up with the interesting idea of potentially being a JMEC project client itself—to obtain fresh ideas from a JMEC team on how to grow further as a chamber.

JMEC is looking forward to building close relations with the SACCJ in coming years and wish it all success for further expansion. So stay tuned!

NAOKO IWAMOTO is a member of the JMEC Editorial Board and a JMEC 20 alumnus.



SACCJ AT A GLANCE

Founded:	2006
Honorary Chair:	H.E. Ambassador Mohau N. Pheko
Management:	Board of Directors (5)
Chair:	Jaco Minaar
Vice Chair:	Jennifer Sakaguchi
Vice Chair:	Kudakwashe Mutenda
Director:	Roger Williams
Director:	Cyril Desgraand (& JMEC Representative)
Secretary General:	Bradley Hankinson
Membership:	~60 corporate & individual members

SOUTH AFRICA IN BRIEF

Official Name:	Republic of South Africa
Capital:	Pretoria
Population:	52 million
Area:	1.2 million square kilometers (5x the size of the UK)
GDP:	USD350 billion (2013) World's 25th largest economy
Currency:	Rand
Export Markets:	China (13%), U.S. (9%), Japan (8%)