

Hoping to see the Algerian flag over Tokyo

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After its independence in 1962, the 1964 Tokyo Olympics were the very first Olympics Algeria participated in. Mohamed Yamani, a gymnast and the sole athlete representing Algeria carried the flag, wrote in an article: "The participation was symbolic for a republic which

had just seen the first light after birth. The Algerian flag floating high in the sky of Tokyo was sufficient for us to be filled with jubilation. We had come before all to affirm our presence on the international stage."

Algeria is a remarkably a sports-loving nation and it has, apart from world-class footballers, numerous Olympic medalists in such events as track and field, boxing and judo. Judo is very popular across the country and constitutes an important chapter in Japan-Algeria cooperation. I still vividly remember the courteous demeanor and firm handshakes with the members of Algerian Federation of Judo headed by Mohamed Merija from gatherings at our house in Algiers. They shared

the stories about their experience of training and competitions with Japanese judoka in Tokyo. As a means to support their training, the Japanese Foreign Ministry donated various equipment, as well as tatami and judo-gi, to the Algerian Federation of Judo.

At that time, Salima Souakri, the African Champion and Olympic medal contender in Barcelona and Atlanta was one of the best-known Algerian judoka among the Japanese residents in Algiers. We called her the "Yawara-chan of Algeria." "Yawara-chan" was an affectionate nickname for Ryoko Tani, the legendary Japanese Olympic champion in the 48-kg weight category. The two medals earned by Algerian judoka in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games in heavier weight categories. I remember calling the Embassy of Algeria in Tokyo the moment I heard the exciting news as I had been watching the two judoka from the time I was in Algeria.

I express my wish that in 2020 an Algerian flag will again fly over Tokyo and many athletes from Algeria will continue to have superb performances in the Olympic Games. On the occasion of the National Day on Nov. 1, let me express my congratulations and best wishes to the people and the government of Algeria.