

Speech by H.E. Mr. CHIBA Hirohisa
Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Vanuatu
at the Reception for Celebrating
the Birthday of His Majesty The Emperor of Japan
at The Melanesian Hotel, on Thursday, 25 February 2021

His Excellency Pastor Obed Moses Tallis, President of the Republic of Vanuatu,
Honourable Ministers, and Members of the Paliament,
The Honourable Ralph Regenvanu, Leader of the Opposition,
Former Presidents and Former Prime Ministers of the Republic of Vanuatu,
Secretary Generals and Lord Mayors from across the archipelago,
Ambassadors and High Commissioners and representatives of the Diplomatic Corps,
Representatives of government, civil society, churches and business leaders,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

Thank you for taking time out of your very busy schedules to attend a reception this evening to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

It is my great honor and privilege to welcome you all this evening

and deliver my speech to you on this very important occasion for all Japanese nationals.

However, please let me continue my speech just in English because I have just started learning Bislama very recently and it is still unable for me to continue the speech in the language. Let me do it for the next time, if possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

His Majesty the Emperor of Japan Naruhito turned 61 years old a couple of days ago, on 23rd of February 2021. His Majesty the Emperor acceded to the Throne as the 126th Emperor of Japan on 1st of May 2019. The Ceremony of the Enthronement was held at the State Hall at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo on 22nd of October 2019, in which His Majesty the Emperor proclaimed his enthronement and received felicitations from representatives in Japan and overseas.

During the Era of Heisei, the reign of the former Emperor, His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus, Japan was able to enjoy a period of peace, free from war, just like the meaning of the name of the Era, which is “Achieving Peace.” In the new Era of Reiwa that means “Beautiful Harmony”, Japan is determined to continue striving to promote friendly relationships with other nations and cooperate with the international community for further development and prosperity in the world. The Imperial Family of Japan has also actively engaged in the promotion of friendly relations with other countries.

Honorable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Friendly relations between Japan and the Republic of Vanuatu have also made excellent progress on the basis of mutual trust and respect. In view of the importance of Vanuatu for Japan and the region, the Government of Japan upgraded its diplomatic mission in Port Vila to a full-fledged embassy early last year. I am very pleased that I have become the first resident and accredited Ambassador of Japan to Vanuatu, with having presented my credentials to His Excellency President Tallis on 6th of November last year.

As we all know, Vanuatu celebrated its 40 years of independence and its graduation from Least Developed Country status last year, on which I wish to congratulate the Government and the people of Vanuatu once again. And this year our two countries celebrate together the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations which took place in 1981, a year after Vanuatu's independence. I hope that we can take advantage of this wonderful momentum to further strengthen this great friendship and significant partnership which exist between Japan and Vanuatu.

As an old and true friend of Vanuatu, Japan has been committed to support the efforts of the Government and the people of Vanuatu for its nation building and sustainable development in line with Vanuatu 2030: the People's Plan. JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), the implementation organization of Japan's economic cooperation, opened its first office in Vanuatu in 1988 and has been actively supporting Vanuatu's national development and human resource development since then. More than four hundreds volunteers were sent to work with local people in various fields in many parts of Vanuatu. Through dispatch of experts from Japan to the

Republic and a large variety of training programs participated in by many Ni-Vanuatu trainees in Japan, the transfer of technology and the enhancement of capacity for building the modern nation of Vanuatu have been developed successfully. Although such direct exchange activities are no longer possible for the moment because of the pandemic of Corona Virus, online training and other kinds of activities still continue to be carried out.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recently I visited Santo Island and signed an Exchange of Notes, with Hon. Marc Ati, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and External Trade, for the detailed design phase of a hydropower station construction project in the Sarakata River. This will be an important infrastructure to provide people in Santo with clean, stable and sustainable power supply into the future. High-quality infrastructure development is one of the mainstreams in Japan's ODA in countries around the world including Vanuatu, such as the construction of the Lapetasi International Wharf, and the reconstruction of Teouma Bridge which is expected to commence soon. Japan has been supporting Vanuatu's socio-economic development efforts through a Grant Aid scheme named "Economic and Social Development Program." Procurement of health, medical and hygiene equipment with the total value of 900 million Vatu has been realized under this program in the last couple of years. Japan, as a disaster-prone country like Vanuatu, is also actively contributing to natural disaster risk reduction and climate change countermeasures. As an example, the Van-REDI project is one of the on-going technical cooperation projects by Japan, working with VMGD (Vanuatu Meteorology and Geo-Hazards Department), to enhance the capacity for providing prompt information on

earthquakes and tsunamis to the public. The J-PRISM project that is for the improvement of solid waste management, and the Grace of the Sea project which is focusing on sustainable coastal resources management are other on-going technical cooperation projects by Japan to keep Vanuatu clean and beautiful.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic we face together now, the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Suga Yoshihide, at the G7 Leaders' Video Conference held last week, stated that vaccines play a critical role in containing the spread of infection, and that it is important to ensure fair access to vaccines and to accelerate their distribution. The Prime Minister emphasized the importance Japan attaches to the COVAX facility as well as Japan's commitment for a new financial contribution of two hundred million US dollars to its mechanism of supporting developing countries.

On this occasion, Prime Minister Suga also stated Japan's determination to host the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games from late July to early September, this northern summer, as a symbol of overcoming COVID-19, in a safe and secure manner, with preparation in close coordination with the IOC.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Pacific island nations, Japan and Vanuatu are excellent partners which can work closely together to tackle the challenges we are facing in this region. The cooperation between Japan and the Pacific island countries including Vanuatu through the triennial PALM (Pacific Island Leaders Meeting) framework is very important. Japan has been hosting PALM summit meeting with Pacific island nations in every three years since 1997, and is now preparing to host the PALM 9 in Japan later this year. Japan continues to promote a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" as

the foundation of regional peace and prosperity.

Invited Guests,

It is really a great pleasure for me to be able to host this reception to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan with you all present here today, as the Corona Virus pandemic has made it impossible to hold similar events in many other countries.

I hope that you will enjoy the Japanese sake, wine and food that we have prepared for you today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding my remarks this evening, I would like to propose a toast with you all to the health of His Excellency President Tallis and to the prosperity of the nation and the people of the Republic of Vanuatu. Please join me with a glass in your hand and say “Kanpai” which is our Japanese expression for “Cheers.”

(Kanpai!)

Thank you very much. Tangkyu tumas.

Now, I would like to ask President Tallis to give us a few words.

Thank you.