

**His Excellency Nikenike Vurobaravu, President of the Republic of Vanuatu,
The Honourable. Stephen Felix Dorrick, Speaker of the Parliament of Vanuatu,
The Honourable Vincent Lunabek, Chief Justice of Vanuatu,
Honourable Ministers, and Members of the Paliament,
The Honourable Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau, Leader of the Opposition,
(Former Presidents and Former Prime Ministers of the Republic of Vanuatu),
(Chief Paul Robert Ravun, President of the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs),
Lady Mayor of Port-Vila, Madame Jenny Tasale Regenvanu
Secretary Generals of Provinces, Paramount Chiefs from across the archipelago,
Ambassadors and High Commissioners and representatives of the Diplomatic Corps,
Representatives of government, UN organizations, civil society, churches and business leaders,**

Mi wantem talem thank yu tumas long yufala evriwan, we yufala i tekem taem blong yufala blong kam join long fanksen ya tede, blong celebretem betdei blong Emperor blong Japan.

(I want to say a big thank you to everyone who took the time to come and join this function today to celebrate the birthday of the Emperor of Japan.)

Two months have passed since the earthquake.

On that day, I never imagined I would be celebrating the 65th birthday of His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito of Japan with everyone here today.

I was uncertain when we would return to our daily lives after witnessing the aftermath. In some regions, major disasters lead to strife and chaos.

However, that was not the case here. The caretaker cabinet immediately took the necessary steps under the amended Disaster Recovery and Resilience Act. Despite the inconvenience, people supported each other and awaited the return to normal.

I believe it was significant that development partners swiftly provided humanitarian assistance. Japan also provided modest support, but it was only a small contribution. We can hold this reception today

due to the efforts of Vanuatu's leaders, ministries, stakeholders, and, above all, the people of Vanuatu. Firstly, on behalf of Japan, I'd like to express my sincere respect and gratitude to the people of Vanuatu.

Last year, I noted that Japan and Vanuatu share many similarities. This belief has grown stronger after witnessing the state of Port Vila post-disaster. As I could see your response overlapping with the efforts of residents and authorities in the affected areas of Japan.

Both Japan and Vanuatu are small island nations rich in nature. We cherish the blessings of nature and value living in harmony with it. Yet, we also feel vulnerable to nature's power and must strive to co-exist sincerely and with awe.

Both nations have inherited the wisdom that our lives are protected by preserving nature and that community-based resilience is vital. Japan's disaster experiences show that resilient neighbourhoods have strong community ties.

Our Commitment to Support Vanuatu for its Recovery

The Imperial Family of Japan has always been mindful of people affected by disasters and has actively engaged in fostering promoting friendship and goodwill among nations to other countries around the world, including Vanuatu.

Japan is deeply grateful to Vanuatu for the thoughts and supports extended after our major disasters in Japan. In return, we are determined to do everything we can do.

Since December 17, as Japan's ambassador, I've also contemplated how and what Japan can do. Rather than succumbing to misfortune, we want to seize this opportunity to rebuild better cities, holding on to hope for sustainable development in Vanuatu.

We pledge to work with the government and people of Vanuatu to move forward in recovery by sharing

our experience and technologies in disaster prevention and mitigation.

Major Events between Japan and Vanuatu in 2024

While memories of the pre-earthquake period may fade, I'd like to highlight some significant events between Vanuatu and Japan last year.

In July, the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) was held in Tokyo, attended by then Prime Minister Salwai. On that occasion, the Emperor and Empress hosted an afternoon tea for the leaders at the Imperial Palace.

Last year also marked the groundbreaking for significant Japanese-supported projects such as the Teouma Bridge and the Sarakata Hydroelectric Power Plant.

Moreover, for the first time in 37 years, a sitting Japanese cabinet minister, then Environment Minister Ito, made an official visit to Vanuatu, met with Minister Regenvanu, and confirmed strengthening cooperation on climate change and environmental protection.

Turning to this year, from April to October this year, the Osaka Expo will be held, with Vanuatu participating as an exhibitor. We hope that this opportunity will support Vanuatu's economic recovery through trade and tourism.

Conclusion

There is a Japanese proverb that says 'turn a disaster into a blessing'. I believe that Vanuatu has a great opportunity to move forward this year and beyond. I hope today's reception will be a benchmark for this, and also a milestone to celebrate our friendship, solidarity and a bright future with Vanuatu.

In concluding my remarks this evening, I would like to propose a toast with you all to good health of His Excellency President Nikenike Vurobaravu and to the prosperity of the nation and the people of the Republic of Vanuatu. If you have a glass ready, please join me in raising a toast.

“To the President.”

Thank yu tumas long atensen blong yufala.

Mo naoia, wetem respect, mi wantem invitem President blong Vanuatu, His Excellency Mr. Nikenike Vurobaravu blong hem i save givim samfala toktok blong hem.

Thank yu tumas.

(Thank you very much for your attention. And now, with respect, I would like to invite the President of Vanuatu, His Excellency Mr. Nikenike Vurobaravu, to share a few words. Thank you very much.)