

46 Years of Independence, 45 Years of Shared Values



By Naohisa Okuda, Ambassador of Japan to Vanuatu

As Vanuatu celebrates the 46th anniversary of its independence, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the people of this remarkable nation. Independence Day is not only a celebration of sovereignty; it is also a celebration of the resilience, dignity and optimism that have shaped Vanuatu's journey over the past forty-six years. On behalf of the people of Japan, I wish all Ni-Vanuatu a joyful

Independence Day and every success in the years ahead.

Just twelve days before this national celebration, I had the privilege of attending another joyful occasion—the opening of a new judo dojo in Port Vila. The previous dojo had been lost in the devastating earthquake of December 2024. Seeing young judoka and their families gather once again in a place dedicated to learning, discipline and friendship was a powerful reminder that

hope can be renewed through shared commitment.

To me, that moment symbolised something far greater. It reflected the friendship that Japan and Vanuatu have built over the past forty-five years—a friendship founded not merely on cooperation, but on trust, mutual respect and shared values.

This year also marks the 45th anniversary of

diplomatic relations between our two countries. When Vanuatu embarked on its journey as an independent nation, Japan moved swiftly to establish diplomatic relations, laying the foundation for a friendship that has continued to deepen over the past four and a half decades. Since then, our partnership has never been defined simply by development assistance. Rather, it has been guided by the conviction that nations become stronger when they

help one another to grow.

In Japan, that conviction is expressed in the philosophy of *Jita-Kyoei*—"Mutual Prosperity for Self and Others"—introduced by Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo. Although born in the dojo, its message reaches far beyond sport. It teaches that genuine progress is achieved not by competing against one another, but by enabling others to flourish alongside us. In many ways, this philosophy resonates deeply with the Pacific spirit of community, solidarity and caring for one another.

The same spirit has shaped Japan's engagement with the Pacific for decades. It inspired the Kuranari Doctrine in 1987 and the establishment of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) in 1997, creating an enduring partnership based on dialogue and mutual respect. Next July, Japan looks forward to welcoming Prime Minister Hon. Jotham Napat to Yokohama for PALM11, where together we will renew our shared commitment to a peaceful, resilient and prosperous Blue Pacific.

The more time I spend in Vanuatu, the more I realise how much our two countries have in common.

We are both island nations whose lives are shaped by the sea.

Above all, Japan and Vanuatu share an enduring commitment to peace, the rule of law and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Although our histories and constitutional traditions differ, both our nations have chosen to place peace at the heart of

their national identity. Japan bears the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while the Pacific carries the enduring legacy of nuclear testing. Together, we share a profound aspiration for a world without nuclear weapons.

Our peoples have also learned to live with the immense power of nature. Earthquakes, cyclones, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis remind us that resilience is not about conquering nature, but about respecting it, adapting to it and rebuilding stronger together.

Perhaps this is why the friendship between our countries feels so natural. For nearly four decades, Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers have lived and worked alongside Ni-Vanuatu—not simply as teachers, health professionals or technical advisers, but as neighbours, mentors and lifelong friends. Their quiet dedication reflects the true meaning of *Jita-Kyoei*: that by helping others to thrive, we enrich ourselves as well.

As Vanuatu celebrates this proud national day, and as our two countries commemorate forty-five years of diplomatic friendship, Japan renews its commitment to walking alongside Vanuatu—not only as a development partner, but as a trusted friend, a fellow island nation, and a nation that believes our shared values will continue to guide us through the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Happy 46th Independence Anniversary, Vanuatu. May our friendship continue to flourish for generations to come.