

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, before I leave this beautiful country and bid you farewell, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for taking the time to join me this evening, despite the short notice.

I arrived in Vanuatu on 8 November 2023. That day happened to be the 88th birthday of the famous French actor Alain Delon — but, more importantly, it was my 61st birthday.

I was fortunate enough to arrive in Vanuatu without any trouble, and fortunately, I was not mistaken for Alain Delon at the immigration counter.

But I still remember spending that birthday rather sadly and alone in this residence, which was still empty because the furniture had not yet arrived. I had only some sandwiches and a bottle of Tusker beer that I had bought at Au Bon

Marché in Nambatu. The next morning, I was to present my credentials to the President.

Today is 8 October, exactly two years and eleven months since that day.

To be honest, I had hoped to stay in Vanuatu as long as possible. Unfortunately, that was not to be. But perhaps that feeling of unfinished business is one reason why I already feel a strong desire to come back to Vanuatu and remain involved with this country for the rest of my life.

Looking back, these nearly three years have been, for the most part, a great joy.

I have enjoyed the beautiful nature, the wonderful food, and the safe and peaceful environment. But above all, what has made my time here so special has been the people of Vanuatu — your warmth, kindness and friendship.

As many of you know, I spent most of my career at Japan's Ministry of the Environment. I was not a career diplomat, and my previous overseas experience was limited. So, when I arrived here, I was very much a newcomer to bilateral diplomacy.

If I was able to serve as Ambassador for nearly three years, it was only because of the warm support, friendship and guidance that I received from so many of you in this room. For that, I am deeply grateful.

There have been many memorable moments during these three years, but perhaps the most significant was the Port Vila–Efate earthquake.

Although I was born and raised in Japan, a country well known for earthquakes, I had somehow spent more than 60 years without experiencing a truly major earthquake.

In fact, I arrived here only one month after Cyclone Lola. Since then, Vanuatu has been spared from major cyclones. I had started to wonder whether I might be a kind of “guardian deity of Vanuatu”.

Unfortunately, it turned out that I was the “guardian deity” who brought an earthquake!

But the days and weeks following the earthquake became one of the most important experiences of my career.

Working together with the Vanuatu Government, the diplomatic corps and international organisations, we discussed what was really needed and how we could mobilise support from the capital.

It was during that difficult period that I felt most strongly the importance of cooperation — between Vanuatu and Japan, among development partners, and between governments, international organisations and local communities.

Japan's contribution to the recovery may have been modest, but I am proud that we were able to contribute in our own way.

One of the most visible results is the reconstruction of Tagabe Bridge, which began several months ago.

Recovery is, of course, still incomplete. I sincerely hope that “Build Back Better” will become more than just a slogan, and that Port Vila will emerge from the earthquake as an even stronger and more resilient city.

Another memorable event was the visit of Japan's Environment Minister Shintaro Ito to Vanuatu in August 2024 — the first visit by a sitting Japanese Cabinet Minister to Vanuatu in 37 years.

That visit helped create new momentum for environmental and climate cooperation, which led to the signing of a

memorandum of cooperation between our two Environment and Climate Change Ministries in March 2026.

Cooperation had already begun in areas such as renewable energy, including the Sarakata Hydropower project on Santo and community-based hydropower in Pentecost.

However, following Minister Ito's visit to Vanuatu, we also saw growing interest from Japanese private companies, including initiatives to bring solar power and battery technologies to communities that are not yet connected to the electricity grid.

I hope these efforts will continue to expand, building on the memorandum of cooperation, not only through government assistance, but also through private investment and people-to-people cooperation.

We have also seen encouraging growth in economic and cultural exchanges.

Vanuatu's participation in the Osaka-Kansai Expo last year gave many Japanese people an opportunity to discover the beauty and uniqueness of Vanuatu.

The number of Japanese tourists, which declined during the COVID-19 pandemic, is gradually recovering and is now increasing further. I hope that even more Japanese people will come to experience Vanuatu for themselves.

There have also been many smaller but very meaningful exchanges — through JICA volunteers, tourism, food-related events in Japan, culinary events led by our Japanese chef, Ms. Hondo, sports, and cultural activities.

And this brings me to a word that I would like to leave with you tonight: “Jita Kyoei” — mutual prosperity.

These are the words of Jigoro Kano, the founder of modern judo.

The idea is simple: we should not seek prosperity only for ourselves. We should support one another and prosper together.

I believe this is not only the philosophy of judo. It is also an excellent principle for Japan's approach to international cooperation.

There is another Japanese concept that I hope will be relevant to the future of our economic relationship: “Sanpo-yoshi.”

It is an old Japanese business philosophy which says that a business is successful only when the seller, the buyer and society as a whole all benefit.

In other words, economic activity should not be about profit alone. It should also bring value to local people and contribute to society.

I sincerely hope that future Japanese investment in Vanuatu will be guided by this spirit — creating benefits not only for Japanese companies, but also for Vanuatu and its people.

As I said at the beginning, my honest feeling is that I would have liked to stay here longer.

I love Vanuatu — its nature, its culture, and, most of all, its people. I have come to feel that Vanuatu is my second home.

On 16 October, I will leave Vanuatu and return to Japan. I do not know exactly what the next chapter of my life will bring, but I hope to continue contributing, in whatever way I can, to friendship and exchange between our two countries.

I understand that a Vanuatu Embassy will soon open in Japan. When it does, I hope to work, as a private citizen,

with the new Embassy to help strengthen the relationship between Vanuatu and Japan.

So, although I am leaving as Ambassador, I do not regard this as the end of my relationship with Vanuatu.

Rather, I hope it is the beginning of a new chapter.

I also very much look forward to returning to Vanuatu in the future — this time not as Ambassador, but simply as a friend of Vanuatu.

The week after I leave, my successor, Ambassador Sachiko Imoto, will take up her post. I am very pleased that, just a few months after Nicolette, the former British High Commissioner, left Vanuatu, a woman will once again be leading one of the diplomatic missions in Vanuatu.

I sincerely ask all of you to give Ambassador Imoto the same friendship, support and cooperation that you have given me.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the local staff of the Embassy of Japan, who have supported me not only in my official duties but also in my daily life at this residence over these two years and eleven months.

I would also like to thank my Japanese colleagues, led by our Deputy Head of Mission, Takanori Hattori.

And, of course, I would like to thank all of you here tonight — colleagues in the Government of Vanuatu, members of the diplomatic corps, international organisations, development partners, friends from the private sector and civil society, and all those who have shared this journey with me.

I may be leaving Vanuatu, but I will take many wonderful memories — and many wonderful friendships — with me.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I invite you to raise your glasses.

To the enduring friendship between Vanuatu and Japan.

To the health, happiness and prosperity of all of you.

And to Vanuatu and Japan — now and always.

Cheers! Kampai!

