

Three Pillars for We the People of the Pacific to Build an Active, Opportunity-filled and Innovative (AOI) Future

5th August, 2019

Professor Pal Ahluwalia, Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of the South Pacific,

Representatives of Diplomatic Corps from Pacific Island countries,

Distinguished Alumni of the JENESYS Programme,

Students of the University of the South Pacific,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I had my first cup of Kava yesterday, and I kind of felt like I had been to a dentist. My tongue went numb, but I kind of liked the pepperly taste of Kava.

I grew up on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. I can smell the sea from my bed room. And I was very excited when I first learned that I would be coming to the Pacific Island region—the best location for diving in the world. Indeed I feel strongly compelled to throw out my speech and go out for a dive right

now. But today, I am wearing my Foreign Minister's hat . . . so I will exercise some self-restraint and concentrate on my speech instead.

Let me first congratulate the University of the South Pacific (USP) for successfully launching the JENESYS 2019 Programme. I would also like to thank USP for its dedication to fostering a close partnership with Japan for the successful implementation of JENESYS Programmes over the years. It is a great pleasure to be here with you all today.

It is my honor to visit several Pacific Island countries on this occasion, because this is the first visit by a Japanese Foreign Minister in 32 years. The last time was in 1987, when then-Foreign Minister Kuranari made a visit to this region.

I am also honored to address you here today in this ICT lecture hall of the USP. This university was founded through cooperation among Pacific Island countries, and Japan provided assistance to build this hall. It is a fitting venue, as this very building is a symbol of the friendship between the Pacific Island nations and Japan.

Today, I would like to touch upon two main points. First, I would like to look back on the history and development of the relationship between the Pacific Island countries and Japan. Second, I will share with you Japan's renewed determination and commitment to the Pacific Island region, and our hope to work together with you to promote good relations and collaborate in building a better future for the entire Indo-Pacific region.

Back in 1987, then Foreign Minister Kuranari gave a speech here in Fiji in which he announced what would later be called the "Kuranari Doctrine."

The doctrine outlined five key principles of Japan's cooperation policy with the Pacific Island region. These are namely: (1) respect for independence and autonomy, (2) support for existing arrangements for regional cooperation, (3) assistance in preserving political stability, (4) provision of assistance to make the region more prosperous, and (5) promotion of people-to-people exchanges.

It was Minister Kuranari who referred to us, the Japanese and the Pacific Islanders, as the “People of the Pacific”—people brought together by this vast ocean in an enduring friendship that we have steadily developed over the years.

One important development during that time is the initiation and evolution of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting Process, or the PALM Process. The PALM Process is a series of summit-level meetings held once every three years between the leaders of Pacific Island countries and Japan.

The PALM Process began in 1997, ten years after the announcement of the Kuranari Doctrine. Through the PALM process, we have built close cooperative relations among us, forging a bond of friendship through candid discussions. With an emphasis on the autonomy and independence of Pacific Island nations, we held a series of discussions on relevant topics, from development to natural disasters and climate change, which we, the “People of the Pacific,” all must confront together.

The PALM process has continued to evolve over the years to facilitate more frequent and more comprehensive dialogues. For instance, the PALM

ministerial-level interim meetings were launched in 2010, and last year saw the formal entry to the Process of New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

The PALM Process continues to evolve today. Prime Minister Abe promised at PALM8 in May last year that we will hold the 4th PALM Ministerial Interim Meeting in the Pacific Island region. So I am pleased to announce today that the fourth Meeting will indeed take place here in Fiji in mid-2020. This will be the first time for a PALM Ministerial Interim Meeting to be held in a Pacific Island nation.

The development of our friendship has also been demonstrated by the increase in the number of Japanese embassies in the region. While there were only two embassies back in 1987, we now have a total of eight. And next year, we look forward to opening our ninth embassy in Vanuatu.

Japan has long provided assistance for quality growth of Pacific Island countries, in particular, placing special emphasis on the development of human resources.

Over the past 32 years, through programmes run by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, or JICA, more than 10,000 Pacific

Islanders have visited Japan for various training programmes, and over 3,700 experts have been deployed to Pacific Island countries to support human resource development throughout the region. In addition, more than 4,300 volunteers have traveled to Pacific Island countries, lived with local people, and contributed to human resource development in their respective fields.

These include one Japanese volunteer who even went on to become a traditional “high chief” in a village in Samoa because he greatly contributed to steady water supply for the locals, and another who fell in love with Palau and ended up working there for 15 years, helping establish the first recycling center in the country.

Education is one of our priority areas. Over the last 32 years, Japan has helped to develop about 600 schools throughout the Pacific Island region. In Tonga, Japan built a dormitory for an institute of technology, making it possible for those living in remote islands to receive fine education.

We have also provided assistance to USP, including the development of a system to deliver lectures via satellite. This system is now helping all Pacific Island countries to access the quality education provided by USP.

Japan has also focused its attention on building quality infrastructure to bolster sustainable economic growth. Over the years, Japan has helped to develop 9 airports as well as numerous ports and road networks throughout the region to improve connectivity among islands, where isolation and lack of connectivity remain a pressing challenge.

Japan has also consistently supported regional cooperation among the Pacific Island nations. As part of this effort, we have been engaged with the Pacific Islands Forum, or the PIF—a key instrument for regional cooperation through regular dialogues since 1989. One prominent example of our close cooperation with the PIF is our provision of thousands of solar power systems and seawater desalination units to all fourteen Pacific Island countries. This assistance was provided through the Pacific Environment Community Fund, which was established at PALM5 in 2009.

People-to-people ties are the foundation for wonderful relations between Pacific Island countries and Japan. Since it was initiated in 2007, the JENESYS Programme has been helping to nourish such ties between our nations through enabling visits to Japan by more than 1,500 university

students from the Pacific Island region. Past and future participants in the JENESYS programme are the true bridge connecting the Pacific Island nations and Japan.

Since 2002, 1,800 Japanese elementary and middle school students have visited Pacific Island nations, on a government programme, while over 1,000 children from the Pacific region have visited Japan. Every year around 170 children visit Japan from the Pacific Islands on the programme.

The Government of Japan has been providing such opportunities to the younger generation in the firm belief that children and young people are our future. Strong ties among our young people is the key to the strong and lasting relations.

Over the last 32 years, the role of Pacific Island countries in addressing challenges such as climate change and maritime issues has rapidly expanded in the global arena. Fiji hosting the ADB General Meeting this May, Fiji chairing COP23 in 2017, and Papua New Guinea hosting APEC last year are all prime examples of the increasing international role of this region. Next

year, Palau will host the Our Ocean Conference, for which Japan will willingly provide its support.

This brings me to Japan's renewed commitment to the Pacific Island region. It has become increasingly clear in recent years that the Pacific Island region plays a key role in the pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific vision. Japan is determined to play our part in ensuring that this region remains free and open.

Building on the past 32 years of cooperation and our historical ties that go back over 100 years, I would like to call on all friends of the Pacific Island region to work together for a better future—a future that is Active, Opportunity-filled, and Innovative. The first letters of these three keywords spell out the word A-O-I “AOI,” which means blue in Japanese, just like the color of my new favorite bula shirt. And just like the English word “blue,” in Japanese the word AOI brings to mind images of the sky and the ocean. I hope we can join together in mapping out a blueprint for such an Active, Opportunity-filled, and Innovative future for the Indo-Pacific region.

Together, let us strive to realize the potential in the future, which is as vast as the Pacific Ocean itself.

Looking to the future, the Government of Japan has decided to increase commitment for the Pacific Island region. Cooperating closely with other partners, such as the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, Japan will extend further cooperation to Pacific Island countries in the field of maritime issues, connectivity, and climate change/disaster management.

More specifically, Japan will 1) promote stability and safety, 2) support resilient and sustainable development, and 3) increase active people-to-people exchanges.

Japan will help to ensure stability and safety in the region. Japan will provide capacity building for maritime law enforcement for government officials from Pacific Island nations. We will dispatch the Japan Coast Guard's Mobile Cooperation Team to Pacific Island nations, just as we did early this year in the case of Palau; which, let me add, was the first time for us to collaborate in this way with a Pacific Island country.

We will continue to provide cooperation for resilient and sustainable development in the Pacific Island region. We will try to boost connectivity in the region through quality infrastructure, such as Palau International Airport and Honiara International Airport in Solomon Islands.

Japan and the Pacific Island countries share a vulnerability to natural disasters. For us, disaster management is critical. Japan has decided to provide additional assistance to the three Micronesian countries and Vanuatu. We will work with these countries to develop communication systems for disaster management, to build disaster management centers, and to procure equipment for the efficient delivery of health services to those affected by disasters. In addition, the construction of the Pacific Climate Change Center in Samoa will soon be completed with a grant from Japan. The Center will serve as a hub for human resource development to tackle the challenges posed by climate change throughout the Pacific Island region.

Japan will contribute to capacity development through technical cooperation and building waste disposal facilities to address waste management issues including marine plastic litters.

Sustainable economic and fiscal policies, including debt sustainability, is another important issue. We will therefore provide technical cooperation for greater fiscal resiliency for some Pacific Island countries.

Japan also would like to emphasize people-to-people exchanges. I am pleased to announce that Japan will be inviting a total of 100 children from all over the Pacific Island region to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games next year.

We will also resume Japanese language courses here at USP. As trial Japanese courses will begin here at USP toward the end of this year, I would like to encourage all of you to take up the challenge of learning Japanese.

The JENESYS Programme is going to evolve this year. In addition to welcoming youth from this region to Japan, we will also be sending young Japanese people to Pacific Island nations for the first time. We look forward to a meaningful exchange for both sides.

Through our renewed focus and commitment to— ensuring stability and safety, supporting resilient and sustainable development, and promoting people-to-people exchanges—I am confident that, we, the People of the Pacific, can bring a brighter future, an AOI future, to the beautiful Pacific region that we call home.

Thank you very much.

[End]