

Celebrating our ‘special bond of friendship’ with the Philippines

Prime Minister Kishida’s Contribution to the Philippine Media

As Prime Minister of Japan, I extend warm greetings to all citizens of the Philippines. Ten years ago, in January 2013, on the 40th anniversary of the establishment of Japan-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation, I came to the Philippines on my first foreign trip after assuming the office of Minister for Foreign Affairs. Today, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Japan-ASEAN relations, I am honored to be able to visit the Philippines again as Prime Minister at the invitation of His Excellency Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. I feel a deep affinity with the Philippines.

History of Japan-Philippines Exchange

Exchanges between our two countries can be traced back to the 16th century, when Japanese communities established themselves here in Manila through trade. In the 17th century, a Christian feudal lord Takayama Ukon fled to Manila after being persecuted in Japan and spent the remainder of his days here. He was eventually beatified as a martyr by the Pope in 2017. Also in the 17th century, Hasekura Tsunenaga, dispatched to Spain by Date Masamune, a feudal lord during Japan’s civil war period, visited Manila on his way back to Japan after



Blessed Justo Takayama Ukon’s memorial statue, enshrined in San Miguel Pro-Cathedral, Manila



Japan-Philippines Summit Meeting: (L) Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (R) Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio

visiting Spain and Rome to have an audience with the Roman Pontiff. In the mid-19th century, Jose Rizal, a national hero of the Philippines stayed in Japan for a while, and a monument to him was erected in his honor in Hibiya Park, Tokyo, near the site of the hotel

where he had resided. Rizal was not only widely admired in the Philippines but was also a pioneer of friendly relations between his country and Japan. This year also marks the 120th anniversary of the settlement of Japanese immigrants in Davao, Mindanao. Along with Baguio in northern Luzon, where the Kennon Road, known as a complex prewar construction project, was completed at the cost of the lives of many Japanese immigrants, a vibrant Japanese community was established in Davao, where more than 20,000 people are said to be engaged in the cultivation of abaca (Manila hemp), which is still used to make Japan’s banknotes. Their descendants maintain strong ties with Japan to this day.

Although there were some difficult times in the past between Japan and the Philippines, the two countries have established a strong relationship that can be described as a “special bond of friendship.”

Filipino spirit of generosity
Looking back on the history between our two countries, the people of Japan will never forget what happened



Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio

in the Philippines during World War II. Whenever Japanese people see the memorial of President Elpidio Quirino, erected in Hibiya Park where Rizal’s effigy stands, they are reminded of the Filipinos’ generous mindset. This spirit is symbolized by President Quirino’s decision 70 years ago to grant pardons to Japanese war criminals for the sake of future bilateral ties. Our postwar bilateral relationship has been underpinned by this generosity of spirit displayed by the people of the Philippines.

We in Japan will also never forget the warm support extended to us by the people of the Philippines in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. The Philippines provided emergency relief goods and dispatched a medical assistance team to Japan. Caregiver candidates under the Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) remained in the disaster area, dedicating themselves to care for the elderly while insisting that they could not abandon them. Meanwhile, as regards the recent terrorist attack against Israel, the people of Japan wish to offer their heartfelt condolences

to Ms. Angeline Aguirre and other Filipino victims, who chose to stay and sacrificed their lives for the sake of the patients in their care. We would like to honor the Filipino people’s warm humanity and sublime spirit of compassion as illustrated by these episodes, just like the sun that continues to shine warmly on Manila, which knows no winter, and glows on the Philippine flag.

Japan’s assistance
Japan, for its part, has spared no effort to meet the expectations of the Filipino people. Since the 1960s, Japan has continued to focus its assistance on the Philippines through Official Development Assistance (ODA). The Pasig-Marikina River Channel Improvement Project, funded by Japanese ODA, has protected the lives and property of many citizens in Manila, the political, economic, and cultural center of the Philippines, from flood damage, as well as the Malacañang Palace, and Intramuros, including the World Heritage Site. The ongoing construction of the Metro Manila Subway, the



Japan Disaster Response Relief Expert Team installation of oil snares for heavy oil absorption in Mindoro © JICA

North-South Commuter Railway, and the Davao City Bypass will play a significant role in improving citizens’ lives and economic development, especially through reducing traffic congestion. As a sign of Japan’s commitment to supporting the Philippines, I announced in February that Japan would contribute JPY 600 billion through ODA and private sector investment, to be completed by March next year. We are confident that this will support the Philippines’ economic development plans, including the Marcos administration’s “Build Better More” program.

Both Japan and the Philippines have suffered many natural disasters such as typhoons and earthquakes. In the aftermath of Typhoon Yolanda in November 2013, as the then-Minister for Foreign Affairs, I immediately made a decision to dispatch our emergency relief team and to provide emergency relief supplies. I subsequently gave instructions for various reconstruction assistance projects to be set up. In March of this year, Japan dispatched a team of experts from the Japan Disaster Relief (JDR) to give advice on dealing with the oil spill disaster caused by the small tanker Princess Empress, which had capsized and sunk off the coast of Mindoro Island. Japan will continue to provide full support for the Philippines in the face of any future disasters.

Many Japanese, including the late Mdm. Ogata Sadako, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees (and a former President of JICA), have been instrumental in navigating a difficult path through the Mindanao peace process, which is vital to the stability and development of the Philippines. Even when the armed conflict escalated in Mindanao in 2008, Japan continued its assistance on the ground, based on the firm determination of President Ogata. Our two countries have been able to promote the Mindanao peace process as an important area of cooperation because Japan and the Philippines have built a “special bond of friendship.” We congratulate Ms. Miriam Coronel Ferrer, a former member of the peace panel of the Philippine Government, on receiving the Ramon Magsaysay Award this year. She greatly contributed to the informal meeting in Narita that marked a milestone on the road to a comprehensive peace agreement. As the 2025 Bangsamoro Parliament election, another major milestone in the Mindanao peace process, is approaching, the Government of Japan will continue to make strenuous efforts in supporting the exit agreement between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), including the decommissioning of former combatants, the reduction of private small arms and light weapons, and capacity building for

the Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

Addressing common issues
When I hear the phrase “special bond of friendship,” it reminds me of the former Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert F. Del Rosario, who passed away in April this year. From January 2013 I held numerous meetings with Secretary Del Rosario, who led the South China Sea Arbitration process, and he and I worked together to strengthen the maritime order based on the rule of law toward the realization of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.” I declare anew my respect for his tremendous contribution to regional peace and stability. Our security collaboration goes beyond traditional bilateral cooperation. It has expanded to encompass trilateral and quadrilateral cooperation, including the United States and Australia. We are also seeing steady progress in the enhancement of the Philippine Coast Guard’s capabilities. In June the first joint exercise was conducted by the maritime law enforcement agencies of Japan, the U.S., and the Philippines. In August, the destroyers Izumo and Samidare visited the Philippines to take part in a quadrilateral exercise involving the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force and the navies of the U.S., Australia, and the Philippines. Furthermore, Japan will promote cooperation through Official Security Assistance (OSA). Japan and



Japan’s Cooperation for the Mindanao Peace Process: (L) then Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida meeting MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ibrahim in Tokyo in 2015 © Philippine Embassy in Japan (R) Ceremonial Opening of the “Assistance for Security Peace, Integration and Recovery for Advancing Human Security in BARMM” (ASPIRE) Project in Basilan.



“BRP TERESA MAGBANUA”, the largest patrol vessel (97 meters) for the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG)



METRO MANILA SUBWAY PROJECT: “Project of the Century”: launch ceremony of the Japanese-made tunnel boring machine

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On the economic front, more than 1,400 Japanese companies are currently operating throughout the Philippines. Japan has been the Philippines’ major trading partner as the number one exporter and number two importer for the past ten years. Moreover, Japan has been one of the top investors in the Philippines over the past several decades. The young and robust Philippine economy and Japanese companies’ technologies and capital resources enjoy a win-win relationship. I believe that Japan will be able to continue to make a significant contribution to the improvement and development of the lives of the Filipino people through its economic endeavors.

Currently, the Philippines is one of the leading destinations for Japanese companies seeking to strengthen their supply chains in Asia. We truly hope that the Philippines will continue to provide an attractive investment environment so that both countries can grow as equal partners based on their strong economic relationship.

Toward further development of bilateral relations and mutual understanding

The strategic partnership between Japan and the Philippines is now more

vital than ever. The key to deepening the “special bond of friendship” is mutual understanding through people-to-people exchange.

There is no question that promoting people-to-people exchange, including studying abroad, language training, and cultural and sports exchanges, is essential in fostering friendship among the young generation in whom our hopes for the future are placed.

While the Japanese Government Scholarship Program, has nurtured many Filipinos who have assumed leadership positions in the Philippines and have deepened their understanding of Japan, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme has become increasingly popular in recent years for hosting Filipinos who aspire to teach English in Japan. I would also like to celebrate the success of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023, co-hosted this year by Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Sports exchange between Japan and the Philippines is also under way, with the Tokyo Olympic gold medalist Hidilyn Diaz’s team holding a training camp in Japan. I am also pleased to see that Japan is attracting many tourists from the Philippines. The number of foreign visitors to Japan this year has now exceeded the pre-pandemic level. Indeed, the number of Philippine visitors to Japan ranked first among the ASEAN countries, with approximately 51,700 visitors in July this year. The growth rate is also the highest among the ASEAN countries, at 36.9% compared to fiscal 2019. We hope that many more of our friends from the Philippines will visit Japan and experience its attractions, including its traditional arts and customs, food, and pop culture.

Closing

On this special occasion of my visit to the Philippines, I would like to express my deep respect for the wisdom and tireless efforts of our many predecessors from both countries who have contributed to the development of Japan-Philippine relations as well as my sincere gratitude for the warmth extended by our Filipino friends.

Together with President Marcos, I will do my utmost to promote relations with the Philippines in the major areas of security, economy and people-to-people exchange, in order to further strengthen the relationship between our two countries, which share common values such as the principles represented by the rule of law, democracy, and freedom. Let us take our “special bond of friendship” to new heights together.



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(FILIPINO SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY)

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JAPAN-PHILIPPINES SUMMIT MEETING (L) Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (R) Japanese Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio

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(JAPAN'S ASSISTANCE)

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(ADDRESSING COMMON ISSUES)

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On the economic front, more than 1,400 Japanese companies are currently operating throughout the Philippines. Japan has been the Philippines' major trading partner as the number one exporter and number two importer for the past ten years. Moreover, Japan has been one of the top investors in the Philippines over the past several decades. The young and robust Philippine economy and Japanese companies' technologies and capital resources enjoy a win-win relationship. I believe that Japan will be able to continue to make a significant contribution to the improvement and development of the lives of the Filipino people through its economic endeavors.

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(TOWARD FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF BILATERAL RELATIONS AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING)

The strategic partnership between Japan and the Philippines is now more vital than ever. The key to deepening the "special bond of friendship" is mutual understanding through people-to-people exchange.

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While the Japanese Government Scholarship Program, has nurtured many Filipinos who have assumed leadership positions in the Philippines and have deepened their understanding of Japan, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme has become increasingly popular in recent years for hosting Filipinos who aspire to teach English in Japan. I would also like to celebrate the success of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023, co-hosted this year by Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Sports exchange between Japan and the Philippines is also under way, with the Tokyo Olympic gold medalist Hidilyn Diaz's team holding a training camp in Japan. I am also pleased to see that Japan is attracting many tourists from the Philippines. The number of foreign visitors to Japan this year has now exceeded the pre-pandemic level. Indeed, the number of Philippine visitors to Japan ranked first among the ASEAN countries, with approximately 51,700 visitors in July this year. The growth rate is also the highest among the ASEAN countries, at



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Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme - Assistant Language Teacher Ms. Donalynne Cielo Lampa

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