

Samoa and Japan – Valued Friends connected by the Blue Pacific



Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa. (Photo: MOFA)

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Talofa Lava!

I will be visiting Samoa for my first tour to Pacific Island countries.

I have always looked forward to visiting Samoa, which is blessed with rich and beautiful seas and nature. I was told that the people of Samoa carry on traditional Polynesian customs. This is very similar to us Japanese: achieving economic growth while preserving our traditions.

I would like to pay my deep gratitude to the Government of Samoa and the people of Apia for their warm hospitality.

Last year, Japan and Samoa celebrated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Relations have grown even closer.

Over the past 50 years, Japan has been a trusted friend of Samoa and supported its development. It is my conviction that people-to-people exchanges are the foundation of this friendship.

Samoa was the first Pacific country to host JICA Japan-Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) in 1972. Since then, nearly 700 JOCVs have been dispatched to Samoa, working in a wide range of fields including education, health, construction, the environment, IT, sports and culture.

The ties - or "Kizuna" - between Japan and Samoa have become solid and strong, and Japan has become a trusted partner, which I believe is the result of JOCVs working together in the field with the people of Samoa.

To date, the largest number of JOCVs have been dispatched in the fields of education and sports, many of whom are science and mathematics teachers and primary school teachers. We are delighted by the contribution that our JOCVs are making to the future of the children of Samoa. Also, through their experiences, these energetic Japanese volunteers learn about Samoan culture and way of life, forge great memories of their time there and remain highly fond of Samoa.

Rugby has also been one of the major contributors to bringing the people of the two countries closer together at the grassroots level.

Manu Samoa is a formidable competitor for the Japanese national team. Samoa's number of wins obviously surpasses those of Japan! Nevertheless, Japan's Brave Blossoms won against Manu Samoa at the Rugby World Cup in France last September, their second consecutive win following on from the England Rugby World Cup in 2015.

The eyes of Japanese fans were glued to their screens while watching the dynamic match between Japan and Samoa. There are Samoan students playing rugby at high schools in Japan, and my local team, the Shizuoka Blue Revs, also had a Samoan player. The Samoan players are a bridge of friendship to the younger generation in Japan.

Japan and Samoa are tied through our deep friendship and "Kizuna", and Japan wishes to continue to be a trusted friend of Samoa. This leads me to the two objectives of my visit to Samoa.

The first is to further promote friendly relations between Japan and Samoa. Japan and Samoa share fundamental values and principles such

as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This relationship of trust can be further strengthened by working closely together on issues such as climate change and related natural disasters including those which are likely to occur due to climate change, and the mainstream adaptation of the concept of Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

As Japan and Samoa are both maritime states, our two countries can also cooperate in the area of maritime security and management. Japan helped to establish the Pacific Climate Change Centre (PCCC) in Samoa, and has sent JICA experts to strengthen the Centre's functions as a focal point for developing human resources. It has also shared information and technology with the region to tackle climate change.

The friendship that has emerged from our bonds, our "Kizuna", and the trust shared between Japan and Pacific Island countries based on our values and principles should be passed on to the next generation as we adapt to changing circumstances. I believe this is one of the principal roles of diplomacy.

The second is the continuation and development of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) process. PALM, which will be held for the 10th time this year, began in 1997 and continues to evolve. Amid major changes in the international environment surrounding the region, it has become increasingly important to uphold a free and open international order based on the rule of law.

In the face of various common challenges, Japan strongly supports the unity of the region, including Samoa, and the commitments articulated in "2050 Strategy" announced by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). Japan strongly wishes to remain a trusted partner in the region, adhering closely to the needs of Pacific Island countries.

With our relationship of trust, when it comes to the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea, I would like to reiterate Japan's commitment to continuing to provide sincere explanations based on scientific evidence in a highly transparent manner to increase reassurance, working closely together with the IAEA.

Following my visit to Samoa, I will attend the PALM Ministerial Interim Meeting in Fiji. I will take this opportunity to engage in candid discussions with my friends from Pacific Island countries on various

issues, and will work together to develop a shared message for our future.

I am determined to further elevate the relationship between Japan and Samoa and between Japan and Pacific Island countries. Through my visit, by reaffirming the limitless possibilities our ties present, I will devote myself to further developing our friendly relations as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Yoko Kamikawa is Japan's Foreign Minister.

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