

PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES AND JAPAN

VALUED FRIENDS CONNECTED BY THE BLUE PACIFIC

Statement



Yoko KAMIKAWA

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan

Ni sa bula vinaka!

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

Fiji, aptly named as “the happiest country in the world”, is filled with a beautiful aura and surrounded by both abundant nature and oceans. I heard that every Japanese who visits Fiji is touched by the hospitality of the Fijian people who greet them with a smile and the words “Bula!”.

I am sure that I will also be charmed by Fiji during my stay. I would like to pay my respects to the Government of Fiji and thank the people of Fiji for warmly welcoming my visit.

This year, Japan will host the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM 10). Prior to that, the PALM Ministerial Interim Meeting (MIM) will take place in Suva. Hence I would like to highlight here both the continuity and evolution of the PALM process.

In 1997, Japan was the first nation to begin a dialogue with PIF members, putting it ahead of other countries. Through PALM, which is held every three years, Japan and Pacific Island countries have developed close cooperative relationships, fostering bonds of friendship - or “Kizuna” - via candid discussions. To date, Japan and Pacific Island countries have held dialogues

on common issues concerning various areas ranging from economic and social development to natural disasters and climate change.

In 2021, PALM 9 focused on (1) COVID-19 Response and Recovery, (2) Sustainable Oceans based on the Rule of Law, (3) Climate Change and Disaster Resilience, (4) Strengthening the Foundation for Sustainable and Resilient Economic Development, and (5) People-to-People Exchanges and Human Resource Development as priority areas. All of these have since seen steady progress.

With the international situation drastically changing for Pacific Island countries, the PALM process also continues to evolve. Ahead of my attendance at the MIM, I would like to highlight four points to which I attach great importance.

First is the rule of law. The free and open international order based on the rule of law has been exposed to serious challenges, as symbolized by the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine.

I would like to advocate that together we aim for a region where human dignity is protected, based on the SDG (sustainable development goal) principle of “No one being left behind.” We can position the Pacific as a region in which the free and open international order based on the rule of law prevails so that all people can enjoy both peace and prosperity.

The second point concerns water and the ocean which surrounds us. Water benefits the ecosystem, environment and economic activities, but also endangers us through disasters such as cyclones, floods and high waves which have become increasingly serious due to climate change. I would like to deepen the discussion with PIF members on this matter.

Third is the promotion of people-to-people exchanges. The foundation of the friendship between Japan and Pacific Island countries is people-to-people exchanges. People have been coming and going between Japan and the Pacific region since the 1900s. Ever since the first Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) were dispatched to the Pacific region more than 50 years ago, approximately 4,000 JOCVs have lived and worked together with the people in the Pacific to bring about

social improvement in a variety of areas, including health and nutrition.

Educational exchanges, particularly among high school students, is important for the further development of friendship between the next generation. Japanese local governments also contribute to exchanges with Pacific Island countries.

Fourth is the concept of Women, Peace and Security (WPS). I have been promoting the mainstream adaptation of WPS since assuming office as Minister for Foreign Affairs. I am convinced of the importance of incorporating an WPS perspective when tackling natural disasters, including those which are likely to occur due to climate change, as well as disaster prevention and mitigation. I look forward to active discussions with PIF members on this point.

Japan strongly supports the commitments articulated in the 2050 Strategy announced by PIF leaders in 2022 and the unity of the region. It is Japan’s intention to remain a trusted partner of 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.

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. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to engage in candid discussions with my friends from Pacific Island countries on various issues, and together we will work to develop a shared message for our future.

I am determined to further elevate the relationship between Japan and Fiji, 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.