



JAPAN & PALAU

日本 - パラオ



This is the first visit to Palau as a Japanese Foreign Minister. This year marks the 25th anniversary of Japan-Palau diplomatic relations, and it is a great pleasure to visit Palau, this beautiful country with which Japan has had traditionally friendly and cooperative relations, in this commemorative year. My visit is a demonstration of Japan's strong will to fundamentally reinforce relations with the Pacific Island countries.

It dates back 32 years ago when a Japanese Foreign Minister visited the Pacific Island countries last time. The relationship between Japan and the Pacific Island countries has steadily developed ever since then—Minister Tadashi Kuranari made the first visit to the Pacific Island countries as a Japanese Foreign Minister in 1987 and promised to develop the relationship.

In 1997, ten years after Minister Kuranari's visit, the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) Process was launched to serve as the basis for the relations between Japan and the Pacific Island countries. Once every three years, the leaders of Japan and the Pacific Island countries have gathered together to hold dialogues to deepen their bonds. Through the PALM process, with an emphasis on the independence and autonomy of the Pacific Island countries, we have held a series of discussions on topics including development, natural disasters, environment and climate change, which we, the "People of the Pacific," all face together, and we have considered solutions by cooperating with each other. The PALM process has continued to evolve. For instance, it has been decided that a PALM Ministerial Interim Meeting will be held next summer in a Pacific Island nation for the first time.

The enhancement of relations between Japan and the Pacific Island region is not limited to summit-level exchanges such as PALM. To promote development of the Pacific Island countries, more than 10,000 trainees from the Pacific Island countries have visited Japan over the past 32 years through various training programmes run by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). People-to-people exchanges have also been steadily promoted. Under the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youth (JENESYS) Programme initiated in 2015, 732 young people from the Pacific Island countries have visited Japan over the course of five years. Through a children's exchange programme initiated in 2002, over 1,000 children from the Pacific Island countries visited Japan, while 1,800 Japanese children visited the Pacific Island countries. Through such exchanges between our people, Japan and the Pacific Island countries have promoted their cultures and values and learned from each other.

In supporting the development of the Pacific Island countries, Japan has attached importance to achieving their quality growth. Infrastructure, the foundation for economic growth, should be "quality infrastructure" in line with international standards, such as openness, transparency, economic efficiency, and fiscal soundness of countries where infrastructure is developed. Based on this view, since 2001, Japan has developed nine airports as well as numerous road networks in this region. Japan itself has achieved economic growth based on human resources, and firmly recognizes the importance of education for economic development. Therefore, Japan has helped to develop about 600 schools in Pacific Island nations.

Over the last 32 years, Japan and the Pacific Island countries have together overcome common issues. Based on this experience, we strongly believe that Japan and the Pacific Island countries are both "People of the Pacific" and share a common future. In addition, the Pacific Island countries play a key role in upholding a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", which is a vision of not only Japan but a vision shared by many countries in the region. Based on this awareness, Japan decided to increase resources for the Pacific Island countries as a key policy which the Japanese government works as a whole.

More specifically, Japan will deepen cooperation with the Pacific Island countries centered on three pillars: promoting stability and safety; supporting resilient and sustainable development; and increasing active people-to-people exchanges. Under the first pillar, promoting stability and safety, Japan will focus on training maritime law enforcement personnel from the Pacific Island countries. This year, for the first time we dispatched Japan Coast Guard personnel to Palau to provide technical guidance to crew members of patrol vessels. Under the second pillar, resilient and sustainable development, Japan is helping to expand, repair and manage the Palau International Airport passenger terminal. Through such development of "quality infrastructure", Japan intends to contribute to the tourism industry and economic development of Palau. Under the third pillar of people-to-people exchanges, Japan intends to further promote interactions between people. Japan will invite a total of 100 children from the Pacific Island countries, including Palau, to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. Furthermore, high school students from Japan will be visiting Palau today for the first time through the JENESYS Programme.

Palau, geographically close to Japan, is home to many people of Japanese descent, and was visited by Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita in 2015. As such, Palau occupies a special place in the Pacific Island region for Japan. During my visit, I hope to meet as many people of Palau as possible and further enhance the bilateral relationship.

KONO Taro
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan