

His Excellency Gotabaya Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, and the Chair of 5th Indian Ocean Conference 2021,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, let me congratulate the Indian Foundation on the opening of the Indian Ocean Conference in UAE.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been driving the international community into a historic transformation, and the theme and timing of this conference is befitting.

The vast Indian Ocean is an important region for realizing a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” which Japan has been advocating. This region not only covers the strategically important sea-lane, but is also crucial for economic activities for many stakeholders.

As the international community faces immense changes and conundrums associated with COVID-19, it is a free and open order based on the rule of law that will bring peace and stability to the Indo-Pacific and beyond. A “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” is a vision based on such idea.

To realize this vision, Japan has been advancing concrete cooperation. In the Indian Ocean region, Japan has provided assistance to port development projects in East African countries and conducted counter-piracy activities in the Gulf of Aden.

Japan is also promoting cooperation with the countries of the Indian Ocean rim, including in the areas of Ecology, Economy, and Epidemic, which are the main themes of this conference.

Firstly, let me touch upon Ecology. The importance of green economy is increasing, as countermeasures against climate change have been advanced on a global scale. In October 2020, Japan declared to realize carbon neutrality by 2050 and in December 2020, adopted the Green Growth Strategy. Japan also aims to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 46% from its fiscal year 2013 levels in the fiscal year 2030, and will continue strenuous effort in its challenge to meet the lofty goal of cutting its emissions by 50%.

In the COP26 World Leaders Summit last month, Prime Minister Kishida announced to provide up to 10 billion US Dollars, both in public and private finance, in the coming five years, which would include our contribution to the launch of Innovative Financial Facility for Climate as

we partner with the Asian Development Bank and others to support the decarbonization of Asia and beyond. Prime Minister Kishida also referred to double Japan's financial assistance to approximately 14.8 billion US dollars in the area of adaptation to climate change.

Japan is providing support to the coastal countries in Indian Ocean region including island nations, to prepare for climate change and natural disasters. For example, we supported a project for improvement of the meteorological radar system in Mauritius, a project on strengthening resilience in Cyclone IDAI-Affected Areas in Mozambique, and a seawall project in Male Island, Maldives.

Secondly, on the Economy.

The world economy has been seriously devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The risk of depending on a limited supply chain has been widely acknowledged. Therefore, it is imperative to firmly uphold free trade and add layers to existing supply chains to avoid such risk.

Toward this goal, Japan has actively participated in international discussions in platforms such as the WTO. Also, we have been leading the way to make high-standard economic rules, to realize a free, open, fair, inclusive, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment and to ensure the free global movement of people, goods, and capital. Looking ahead to a bright and prosperous post-COVID-19 era, we are determined to continue to expand cooperation in the field of economic security as well.

In addition, in order to bolster economic activities in developing countries, Japan is implementing the COVID-19 Crisis Response Emergency Support Loan of up to 700 billion Japanese Yen or 6.3 billion US Dollars over the course of two years since the outbreak of the pandemic. Japan has provided related financial support to the countries in the Indian Ocean region, such as India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Mauritius, and the Maldives, to contribute to their economic recovery.

Lastly, I would like to briefly touch upon epidemic prevention.

As people's lives, livelihoods and dignity are threatened across the globe, it is important to strive towards achieving Universal Health Coverage based on the principle of "human security," that "leaves no one's health behind."

Japan has taken multi-layered efforts on this front: first, to overcome the current crisis of the pandemic; second, to strengthen health and medical systems; and third, to establish an environment resilient to infectious diseases. Japan has been providing COVID-19 vaccine related support in cooperation with the COVAX facility and other international frameworks to ensure equitable access to safe, effective, and quality-assured vaccines in all countries and regions. In addition to Japan's financial contribution of 1 billion US Dollars to the COVAX facility, Japan has donated and delivered 30 million doses of vaccines and will provide up to around 60 million doses in total. Japan has also been supporting cold chain system development as "Last One Mile Support" to ensure the delivery of vaccines to vaccination sites.

The Indian Ocean is vast and involves many stakeholders. After experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan believes that it is a common perception that multilateral cooperation is essential to overcome various challenges.

Japan will continue to join hands with all the like-minded partners in the Indian Ocean region for the stability and peace of the region.

Thank you very much.