



# ISLAND TIMES

Palau

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## Palau and Japan – “Tokubetsu” Friends

From Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan Honorable IWAYA Takeshi

Alii !

I will be visiting Palau to attend the inauguration ceremony of President Surangel S. Whipps, Jr. for his second term. This will be my first visit to a Pacific Island country, and I am truly happy to visit this beautiful country, blessed with abundant nature and crystal-clear blue ocean.

On behalf of the Government and people of Japan, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the President on his re-election. Japan puts emphasis on relations with Palau, and I, as Minister for Foreign Affairs, made decision to attend the inauguration ceremony.



Last year, Japan and Palau celebrated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, though the history of our interactions dates back over 200 years when the crews of the Japanese ship *Jinja-maru*, which had drifted ashore in Palau, received warm care and assistance from the people of Palau. After World War I, under Japanese mandate, approximately 25,000 Japanese people settled in Palau during the peak, and even now, many Japanese-Palauan people contribute actively across various fields of society. The use of Palauan words with Japanese origin, such as “tokubetsu” and “daijobu”, is a symbolic reminder of the long and deep history of exchange between our two countries.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. During the war, Peleliu and Angaur Islands were the fiercest battlefields in Palau. To this date, the people of Palau have shown great consideration and cooperation in the managing and cleaning of memorials and cemeteries, as well as in the repatriation of war dead remains. This historical background has now become the cornerstone of the bond or *kizuna* between the two countries. In 2015, on the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of the time visited Palau and laid flowers at the Monument to the War Dead of the Western Pacific in Peleliu Island.

My visit to Palau this time will focus on the following two points to further strengthen the “tokubetsu” relationship between the two countries bound by such deep friendship and a strong *kizuna*.

The first point is to further promote the friendly relationship between Japan and Palau.

We share the goal of realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific. Against this backdrop, we will further strengthen this relationship of trust between the two countries and confirm our cooperation and collaboration to achieve regional stability and prosperity. In addition, Japan has provided various forms of support to Palau's economic growth as well as to peace and stability. We will spare no effort in providing cooperation that aligns with the needs of Palau.

In addition, people-to-people exchanges and grassroots-level exchanges are essential elements in strengthening relations between the two countries. “Iakiu” (baseball) was introduced by the Japanese exactly 100 years ago in 1925 and remains the most popular sport in Palau today, with people from both countries enjoying sports exchanges. Youth exchanges are also being promoted through the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths (JENESYS) program, and I sincerely hope that those who have participated in these activities will become “bridges” between the two countries in the future. This spring, direct chartered flights between Japan and Palau are scheduled to begin, and we welcome this as an opportunity to further promote people-to-people exchanges. We look forward to many Japanese people visiting the beautiful islands of Palau.

The second point is to follow up on the outcomes of the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10), which was held in Tokyo last July with the attendance of President Whipps. There, Japan and the Pacific Island countries and regions confirmed their commitment to “striding forward together” towards the future while working on common issues. As meeting outcomes, we adopted the PALM10 Leaders' Declaration and the PALM10 Joint Action Plan. This is one of the achievements of PALM10. We will continue to discuss how we put these outcomes into concrete action and ensure they lead to the next PALM11.

Amid significant changes in the international environment surrounding the region, protecting the free and open international order based on the rule of law is becoming increasingly important. Japan and the Pacific Island countries and regions are robust partners with one another in achieving this shared vision. While strongly supporting the unity of the region, including Palau, and the commitments articulated in “2050 Strategy” announced by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Japan strongly wishes to remain a trusted partner in the whole region, adhering closely to the needs of Pacific Island countries. Next year, Palau will serve as the chair of the PIF. In terms of strengthening relations between Japan and the Pacific Island countries, the bilateral relationship between Japan and Palau plays an even more important role.

Although this will be a short visit, I look forward to meeting President Whipps, Minister of State Mr. Gustav N. Aitaro and the people of Palau. I hope that my visit will help to further develop the “tokubetsu” relationship between Japan and Palau.

Me sulang.