

Speech by His Excellency MIWA Yoshiaki,
Ambassador of Japan to Solomon Islands
on the Occasion of Emperor's Birthday Reception
at
Kitano Mendana Hotel
on
Thursday 22nd February 2024

In March, about a month after last year's Emperor's Birthday Reception, then Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Solomon Islands and met with Prime Minister Sogavare and Foreign Minister Manele to exchange views on bilateral relations as well as regional and global issues. The first visit to Solomon Islands by a Japanese foreign minister has underlined the growing importance of the bilateral relationship, and in August the Maritime Self-Defence Force destroyer Shiranui paid a goodwill visit to the port of Honiara. In November, Deputy Foreign Minister Horii visited Solomon Islands and met with Foreign Minister Manele. Deputy Minister Horii also met with key Solomon Islands ministers and parliamentarians to promote bilateral understanding.

Solomon Islands successfully hosted the Pacific Games in November last year. A ceremony was held in March to mark the opening of Honiara International Airport and in October to mark the opening of the Kukumu Highway, which links

the airport to the city centre. These two JICA projects are the Japanese Government's contribution to the Pacific Game. We are confident that the upgraded airport and highway will make a significant contribution to the future development of Solomon Islands. Although these are major projects undertaken by JICA, today I would like to introduce you JICA volunteers contribution to the game. Namely, seven of the 15 JICA volunteers operating currently in the country supported the Pacific Games. A physiotherapist worked as a trainer for the football team, a physical education teacher as a coach for the long-distance runners, and an occupational therapist at the polyclinic, prescribing and supporting the athletes all day during the Games. Also, three JICA volunteers in Vanuatu, as members of Vanuatu team attended the game. I invited all JICA volunteers to this reception today. The member of JICA volunteers, please raise your hands.

Other activities during the past year included the exchange of letters with the Ministry of Police and National Security and Correctional Services for the provision of a landing craft to transport UXO and UXO-clearance equipment from Western Province to Hells Point, the donation of a fire truck to the same ministry. In addition, in January this year, Japan's UXO

clearance expert team of Self Defense Force visited Solomon Islands to conduct a two-week training course for the RSIPF-EOD team, which included training on the structure and function of former Japanese Army's ammunitions, as well as awareness-raising activities for the local population.

The Embassy of Japan has been providing classrooms, water supply system, clinics through the Grassroots Human Security Grant Assistance for many years. In April, I visited Malaita to attend the handing-over Ceremony of "The Project for the Construction of Classroom Building for Aimela Early Childhood School". In Malaita, I also visited Falake Community, where the "Project for the Construction of Micro Hydropower Plant and Power Transmission Facility" is being implemented. In May I visited Kaevanga, Isabel Province, where the Embassy is to provide a water supply system. Visiting the community by boat from Honiara in rough sea was no easy at least for me, but it was a very valuable experience to learn about the lives in the rural community. I also visited Choiseul Province in June and Makira Province in August, where I visited facilities related to local agriculture, fisheries and forestry, which was also precious experiences for me to consider what kind of cooperation should we promote. I am grateful to Premier Tongoua Tabe and the

provincial government of Makila Province for their hospitalities to accept us.

Through these visits, I realised that while Solomon Islands is blessed with an abundance of nature and natural resources, there are also many challenges to develop the economy and society. Japan not only builds infrastructure, but also sends experts, provides necessary equipment and technical education and trainings to local people in order to help developing countries' efforts to address their challenges through enhancing those countries' ownership. It has been almost two years since I arrived in Solomon Islands as ambassador. Since then, I have worked on forming projects that are truly necessary for Solomon Islands' development, making use of the special features and strengths of Japanese ODA policy. The Embassy's focus here in Solomon Islands is on initiatives to empower rural communities, where more than 80% of Solomon Islanders live, to realize sustainable development.

The key to these projects is sustainable development of three pillars of Solomon's industry, agriculture, forestry and fisheries and how they can be realistically and steadily developed under the conditions in which Solomon currently finds itself. In addition to

these steady, incremental projects, infrastructure as a framework for industrial development is also critical to the development of society and industries, which will lead to the growth of the private sector as a driving force of development, but without entailing negative impact to the society through a deliberate and meticulous strategy.

Japan and Solomon Islands have developed good relations since the independence of Solomon Islands on July 7, 1978, when the diplomatic relationship between our two countries has been established. Two months later, on September 25, 1978, in the United Nations General Assembly General Debate, then Foreign Minister Hiroyuki Sonoda welcomed in his statement Solomon Islands, a friend of Japan in the South Pacific, to the United Nations and said that "Japan hopes to deepen cooperation with the Solomon Islands both inside and outside the United Nations".

In a few years, it will be half a century since Japan and Solomon Islands has established diplomatic relationship. I would like to conclude my remarks by saying that Japan and Solomon Islands have made untiring efforts to develop our relationship and Japan will continue to make the efforts that we have been making up to now in the future as well.