

*Speech by His Excellency MIWA Yoshiaki,
Ambassador of Japan to Solomon Islands
on the Occasion of the Ground Breaking Ceremony of
the Project for the Improvement of the Kilu'ufi Hospital
on Monday 14th October 2024, Auki*

Hon. Paul Bosawai Popora, Minister of Health & Medical Services,
Mr. Randol Sifoni, Deputy Premier of Malaita Province,
Ms. Pauline McNeil, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health & Medical Services
(MHMS),
Dr. David Danitofea, Provincial Health Director,
Mr. Coswel Nelson, Director of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury,
Dr. Gregory Jilini, Deputy Secretary Health Care, MHMS,
Dr. Rex Maukera, Director Primary Healthcare Program, MHMS,
Hon. Roselyn Emi, Provincial Minister of Health,
Hon. Joe Hero'au Speaker of the Provincial Assembly
Hon. Benjamin Baetalua, MPA Aimela Ward,
Rev Bp Michael Bebeu Diocean, Bishop, Diocese of Malaita, ACOM
Bp Peter Houhou, Bishop of the Diocese of Auki

Good morning!

It is a great honor for me to attend here today the Ground Breaking Ceremony of the Project for the Improvement of the Kilu'ufi Hospital representing the government of Japan.

It is extremely significant to establish a medical service system in Malaita, the most populous province in the Solomon Islands, so that the inhabitant in Malaita can enjoy an appropriate medical care in their own province without having to visit Honiara. The medical infrastructure project will provide the basis for the robust and sustainable development of Malaita. I have visited Malaita many times since I arrived in Solomon in April 2022, and I strongly hope that this province with rich human and natural resources as well as potential for the development will grow together with the other eight provinces.

Providing appropriate and reliable medical and health services to citizens is one of the most important responsibilities of all governments. Such services are the top policy priorities. In addition to efforts of each government in the world, strategic initiatives are being undertaken by the United Nations, WHO, and other international organizations. Of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted at the 2000 Millennium Summit, three are related to healthcare such as improving maternal and infant health and combating infectious diseases. Since around 2010, the concept of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) has been gaining ground, and in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted at the UN General Assembly in 2015, UHC, improvements in maternal and infant health, and infectious disease control were listed in Goal 3 of SDGs.

Japan - Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Declaration adopted at the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) held in Tokyo July this year states that "leaders reiterated their commitment to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving all Sustainable Goals. They expressed their commitment to addressing health challenges including for non-communicable diseases and mental health conditions, through strengthening healthcare system to accelerate progress towards universal health coverage (UHC)".

Looking at PALM10 Joint Action Plan, it states that "the PALM Partners will strengthen cooperation in addressing both communicable and non-communicable diseases, lifestyle related diseases and developing resilient health care system towards achievement of universal health coverage through building medical facilities, provision of quality medical equipment including telemedicine and building capacity by incorporating "KAIZEN" know-how for health and medical workers. The PALM Partners will also participate in discussions at the Pacific Health Ministers Meetings (PHMM) and cooperate at the policy level." In this sense, the Project for the Improvement of the Kilifi Hospital is a very significant initiative that embodies the PALM 10 Leaders' Declaration and Joint Action Plan.

In order to achieve UHC, it is essential to have an environment where people can receive medical care, for which improving physical access to medical services is crucial. In other words, firstly, it is necessary to improve medical institutions such as hospitals and clinics so that all Solomon Islanders in need of medical services can receive treatment. Second, even

if there are medical institutions, it is not possible to provide the necessary medical services without medicines and medical equipment. Establishing a system that can provide medicines and medical equipment are necessary. Third, doctors and nurses are needed. In this sense, the improvement of the Kilu'ufi Hospital will strengthen UHC in the Malaita Province and will also be of great significance for the Solomon Islands as a whole.

Japan's healthcare policy has developed over the past century and more with a focus on how to respond to the most critical issues of each era in order to protect the lives and health of the people. In the latter half of the 19th century, when Japan introduced a modern medical and healthcare system, acute infectious diseases such as cholera, plague and dysentery were the most serious problems. To address this challenge, efforts were made to strengthen public health administration by developing the social epidemic prevention system. In addition, the construction of modern water supply systems to provide clean drinking water to urban areas also started. From the 1920s through to World War II, when the medical system was being developed due to rapid industrialization, the focus of Japan's medical and health policies was on measures to combat chronic infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, and on reducing infant and maternal mortality. At the time, the infant and maternal mortality rate in Japan were high in comparison with international statistics. To address this problem, a system of maternal and infant health services was introduced. After the 1960s, as urbanization and economic development progressed in an accelerated manner, while the medical and health system for dealing with the above-mentioned challenges attained certain level of results, lifestyle-related diseases, NCDs, are increasingly being recognized as an important health issue, shifting gradually the focus of medical and health policy to measures against NCDs. Since the 1980s, Japan has seen a number of emerging social changes and new issues, such as the declining birthrate and aging population, the development of highly advanced medical technology, and the demand for diversification of medical and health services. In the past decades Japan has worked to (1) shift from quantity to quality in medical services, (2) build an efficient and effective medical service delivery system adequately adjusted to the changing society, and (3) create an integrated approach to community-based medical, health, and welfare services. I think there is enormous scope for utilizing Japan's experience and expertise in healthcare, which has developed through the history mentioned above, to develop healthcare in the Solomon Islands.

Some of the pressing issues that the Solomon Islands needs to address include malaria control and NCDs. Although the number of malaria cases has been consistently decreasing from the 1990s until 2014, this positive development was reversed, increasing the number of malaria infection cases again. In particular, the increase in cases of falciparum cases, which has a high mortality rate, is a cause for our concern. Currently, we are considering to provide equipment for malaria control. With regard to NCDs, there is concern that diabetes is on the rise as a result of changes in eating habits, which has increased the number of amputations. The Healthy Village Project, which comprehensively tackles malaria and NCDs from four areas - ①malaria, ②NCDs, ③nutrition, and ④water, sanitation and hygiene - was implemented by JICA between 2016 and 2021. Since NCDs are diseases that occur as a result of a combination of various factors, it is thought that such a comprehensive and integrated approach is important. Japan hopes to make a meaningful contribution to addressing the NCDs issue in the Solomon Islands. In this sense, I think cooperation in fields such as agriculture and fishing is important as well, not just in the medical field. With that said, in order to protect and maintain the health of Solomon Islanders, the development of medical facilities is an urgent issue, and I hope that the improved Kilifi Hospital will play a pivotal role as a base for medical and health care in the country.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who involved in the Project for the Improvement of the Kilifi Hospital, including the Ministry of Health and National Medical Services, JICA, the Malaita Provincial Government, Fukunaga Architects-Engineers, Kitano Construction Corp., and Yachiyo Engineering Co., Ltd. They are the people who have worked tirelessly to make this project a reality, which is of great significance for cooperation between Japan and the Solomon Islands. I strongly hope that this project will progress successfully.

Thank you!

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