

*Speech by His Excellency MIWA Yoshiaki,
Ambassador of Japan to Solomon Islands on the Occasion of
the Ambassador's Commendation Awarding Ceremony
on Friday 15th November 2024, Honiara*

Hon. Harry Kuma, Guest of Honor, Minister of commerce, industries, labour & Immigration,
Hon. Isikeli Vave, Minister of home affairs,
Mr. Collin Beck, Permanent Secretary of Ministry of foreign affairs,
H.E. Jonathan Schwass, High Commissioner, New Zealand High Commission
Mr. Anthony Calejari , Chargé d'Affaires, Embassy of United States,
Mr. Ansa Puaraua, Acting Team Leader of EOD Team, RSIPF,
Ms. Emma Davis, Deputy High Commissioner, British High Commission,
Mr. Tony Heorake, Director of National Museum , Ministry of Culture and Tourism,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for attending the Ambassador's Commendation Awarding Ceremony for three gentlemen who have made outstanding contributions to the promotion of bilateral relations between our two countries. Mr. Willie Besi of Barana Village and Mr. Mato Mui Liliau of Kakabona Village, who have been consistently supporting the repatriation of the remains of fallen Japanese soldiers in Guadalcanal. And Inspector Clifford Tunuki, Director of the EOD Team of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), who is in charge of unexploded ordnance disposal and closely cooperated with Japan.

In the Solomon Islands, fierce battles between the Japan and Allied forces took place from 1942 to 1944. The number of Japanese soldiers fallen in action throughout the Solomon Islands was over 50,000, and on the island of Guadalcanal, where particularly fierce fighting took place, approximately 22,000 Japanese soldiers were fallen. There are still many UXOs in the country; they threaten the lives and safety of the citizens of the Solomon Islands still today. When we look back on this harsh past and see the reality that the disasters of the past continue to cause people to suffer even today, we must accept these facts with solemnity without turning away.

Having learned from the calamitous defeat in World War II, Japan has vowed never to repeat the same mistake and has decided to contribute to the peaceful and prosperous development of the world , democracy and rules-based international order. The

invasion of Ukraine by Russian started in February 2022 and the Middle East situation threaten the peaceful international order. The international community is called upon to work together to prevent the spread of the devastation caused by these recent developments. We must not allow tragic battles like those that occurred here on Guadalcanal and in the Solomon Islands 8 decades ago to happen again. Japan strongly commits to contributing to rule based international order and security and will work to stabilize the security situation in the region surrounding Japan.

The Japanese government has worked to repatriate the remains of fallen soldiers who were forced to leave peaceful civilian lives with their families and friends and lost their lives amidst the historical tide of the war time. The families of these fallen soldiers, who strongly desired the return of their remains, as well as former Japanese soldiers who returned to Japan alive, have been visiting the former battlefields to repatriate the remains and hold memorial services for all victims of the war since the mid-1960s, when Japan had repatriated from the post-war confusion and restrictions on overseas travel began to be eased. These groups of repatriation operations were active in Asia and the Pacific countries involved in World War II. They did not only engage in repatriation operations, but also worked on efforts to apologize and reconcile with the local people who had suffered so much from the war. In Solomon Islands, they initiated to arrange events for reconciliation and mutual understanding, donations to schools, and the provision of scholarships as civilian organizations.

Japan and Solomon Islands established diplomatic relations in July 1978, the same month Solomon gained independence, and have enjoyed a cordial bilateral relationship. I would like to point out that the reason for the extremely good bilateral relations at the grassroots level as well as at the government level is that these Japanese repatriation operation groups have been carrying out various activities at the grassroots level, let alone Grassroots projects of the Embassy and JOCV members' activities over Solomon Islands. Two years ago, in November 2022, the World Cup was held in Qatar about six months after I arrived in Solomon, I saw many cars moving in Honiara with Japanese flags. When I was jogging in the city, the children I passed cheered for Japan. The Japanese Embassy is committed to developing good relations with Solomon Islands at both the government and grassroots levels.

UXOs that remain still in various parts of Solomon Islands threaten the peaceful and safe lives of citizens and impedes development of the country. At PALM 10 held in Tokyo in July this year, the leaders confirmed that they would cooperate in the clearance of UXO. In 2022, Japan provided US\$787,815 to the Royal Solomon Islands

Police Force (RSIPF) EOD team to procure equipment for UXO clearance, including excavators, vehicles and an explosives storage facility. In 2023, Japan provided 120 million yen for procurement of a landing craft for transporting UXO. From January to February this year, the Ministry of Defence and the Self-Defense Forces of Japan dispatched instructors to the RSIPF EOD team for training session on the structure and function of the former Japanese Imperial Army ammunition, as well as for sharing the knowledge and expertise on how to enhance the awareness of the general public.

Now, I would like to introduce the three gentlemen who will receive the Ambassador's Commendation. Mr. Willie Besi and Mr. Mato Mui Liliau, who have supported repatriation operations in Guadalcanal. In order for the Japanese repatriation operation teams to collect remains in various parts of the Guadalcanal, the cooperation provided by the local community is critical. It is the local people who know where the remains of fallen Japanese soldiers are located, and the consent of the local community for the operation is also necessary. I have explained how the Japanese repatriation operation teams worked hard to promote mutual understanding at a grassroots level, but such mutual understanding would not have been possible if the local community had not accepted. Mr. Willie Besi and Mr. Mato Mui Liliau have played a pivotal role in enabling the activities of the Japanese remains collection team through sincere and tireless coordination and works.

Mr. Willie Besi's Balanan community includes Gifu Ridge, one of the fiercest battlefields on Guadalcanal. Since the 1980s, Mr. Peter Besi, father of Mr. Willie Besi, had been supporting the project to collect the remains of his father. After Peter Besi passed away in 2010, Mr. Willie Besi took over from his father and continued to support the search for and repatriation of remains by the Japanese teams. He helped Japanese teams not only in Gifu Ridge area, but also at Horse Ridge, Galloping Horse Ridge and other locations over a wide area. He supported also Japanese teams on the Maruyama Trail, which the Japanese army had built through the dense Jungle to attack Henderson Field from the southern direction. When logging was carried out in the Maruyama trail area, he also carried out awareness activities to explain the importance of preserving the site for future repatriation operations.

In the Kakabona Village community of Mr. Mato Mui Liliau, his grandfather and father have supported the work of Japanese teams operations since the 1990s. Mr. Mato Mui Liliau has been supporting Japanese Teams succeeding his grandfather and father since 2006 consistently with sincereness. He has also been involved in the maintenance of the memorial monuments erected by the Solomon Islands Association and the War

Veterans Association, and has been cleaning and maintaining them with his family and local residents.

Inspector Clifford Tunuki, who is currently studying in Australia, has been working as the Director of the EOD team of the RSIPF since 2017. He coordinated the various arrangements for the implementation of Japan's grants in 2022 and 2023 for the provision of equipment for the UXO clearance operation. He was also coordinated the arrangements for the capacity building program for the EOD team provided by the Ministry of Defence and the Self-Defense Forces in 2024.

Before ending my remarks I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Mr. Willie Besi and Mr. Mato Mui Liliau, who have provided generous and tireless support for the activities of the Japanese repatriation operation teams, as well as all members of their communities. My sincere appreciation and respect go to Director Clifford Tunuki and his team members, who are working hard on the important task of UXO clearance on a daily basis.

Thank you!