

“E tumau pea le faigapa’aga a Iapani ma Samoa”

(Japan is always with the people of Samoa!)

**Ambassador’s message to the people of Samoa to celebrate the birthday of
His Majesty the Emperor of Japan**

On 23rd February 2021, His Majesty the Emperor of Japan will celebrate his 61st birthday. As Ambassador of Japan, I was supposed to host a reception to celebrate His Majesty’s birthday with the people of the Independent State of Samoa. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has yet to end, the number of victims is still increasing, and health workers around the world are battling with this disease without rest. Samoa also continues to extend its State of Emergency Order for COVID-19.

I therefore have decided, instead of hosting the reception for this year, but to send my message to all my dear friends “E tumau pea le faigapa’aga a Iapani ma Samoa” (Japan is with the people of Samoa!).

Through this message, I would also like to introduce Japan's initiatives focusing on assistance for countermeasures to COVID-19 pandemic through collaboration with the Pacific island countries (PICs).

Firstly, let me begin with Japan’s assistance to the COVID-19 pandemic which has obviously been threatening the lives of the people of the PICs. International coordination and cooperation are essential to tackle with the pandemic and the human security crisis. To bring the pandemic under control as soon as possible and to prepare for future crises, Japan will actively contribute itself to helping PICs and developing countries bolster their health and medical systems. In order to promote Universal Health Coverage with the spirit of “leaving no one’s health behind”, Japan will extend its full support to ensure equitable access to vaccines for all, including those in developing countries.

As part of international concerted efforts, in October 2020, Japan announced to contribute no less than 130 million USD to the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Advance Market Commitment to enable PICs and developing countries to ensure equitable access to the vaccines. I am very happy that the COVAX Facility is now in operation and the vaccines are about

to be distributed to Samoa.

Secondly, I would like to refer to Japan's collaboration with Samoa and other PICs. Japan and PICs are in so important and long-standing partnership, sharing the Pacific Ocean and addressing common challenges. Further enhancing this partnership, Japan has been hosting summit-level meeting named the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) every three years since 1997. Through the PALM, Japan and PICs have been building close cooperative relationships and forging the bond of friendship. The Honorable Prime Minister Tuilaepa is the only leader who has participated in all meetings of the PALM and co-chaired with the former Prime Minister of Japan ABE Shinzo at the last meeting (PALM8). That meeting was held at the Spa Resort Hawaiians in Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture in 2018. Then this year, 2021, Japan will host PALM9 where the leaders of 19 countries and regions will get together and discuss urgent agenda such as COVID-19 pandemic as well as climate change and natural disasters.

As preparatory for PALM9, the Ministerial Interim Meeting was held online on 20 October last year, and the Ministers recognised the devastating health, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of regional and multilateral collaboration to respond and recover.

To respond to their recognition, Japan emphasised its determination to support PICs, in cooperation with international and regional organisations, not only through short term assistance but also through mid-to-long term assistance to strengthen their health care systems amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The assistance includes the provision of 4 billion JPY worth of medical equipment and 580 million JPY worth of technical support and medical supplies.

Japan also expressed its intention to assist PICs to respond to economic difficulties caused by COVID-19 as well as to achieve longer-term sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Japan also emphasised that it was working closely with other development partners such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Nations organisations to support PICs by providing assistance for health systems, economic recovery and infrastructure needs.

Further, the Ministers expressed their commitment to together building a stable, resilient, and prosperous Pacific region in the post COVID-19 era. To achieve this commitment, participating members will deepen their discussions on many issues of cooperation in the process towards PALM9.

Finally, I underline that Japan is steadily preparing for the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games midyear with safety and security as the highest priority issue so that we can welcome Samoa's national team of athletes and officers to Japan. I would like to conclude this message by stating "E tumau pea le faigapa'aga a Iapani ma Samoa" (Japan is always with the people of Samoa!)

Fa'afetai lava. Soifua!