

**SPPECH BY H.E. RYOTARO SUZUKI, AMBASSADOR OF JAPAN,
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION OF HIS MAJESTY THE
EMPEROR
21 FEBRUARY 2025**

Reverend Semikueva Fa'atoafe Ugapo,
Lau Afioga i le Ao o le Mālō, Tuimalealiifano Va'aletoa Sualauvi II.
Honourable Prime Minister, Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa,
Honourable Cabinet Ministers,
Honourable members of the Legislative Assembly and the Judiciary,
Honourable members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening and Talofa lava!

There is a saying that distance is the tyranny of nature. I never thought of that seriously but in mid-December, I was transferred here from another island country called Iceland. The distance of 13,956km. It's practically on the other side of the globe. That was a long trip. 4 flights, stopping and changing flights at three different places. It took me two whole days to get here.

The distance between Samoa and Japan, on the other hand, is just over 7,500 km. There is no direct flight between Samoa and Japan yet, but via Auckland, you can get there while you are sleeping. It may seem like a considerable distance, but in fact, we are not that far apart.

Samoa and Japan are both island nations facing the same body of water, called the Pacific Ocean. We are in fact neighboring countries connected through this Ocean.

The ties between Japan and Samoa are long and deep.

The first JOCVs, Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, were dispatched to this region in 1974. Samoa was the first to receive those volunteers in the region.

Since then, the total number of dispatched volunteers has exceeded 700. Many of them fell in love with Samoa, and some of them return to Samoa like migratory birds. Many volunteers recorded their experiences in Samoa during their deployment or after returning home. If ordinary Japanese people have an opportunity to learn about the lives of Samoans, and their culture, it will be from such books and memoirs that these volunteers have written.

You may recall that the international border was closed during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, the dispatch of volunteers had to be suspended. All the remaining volunteers went back to Japan, before the closure of the border. But the number of volunteers is gradually picking up since then, and now there are 10 volunteers working in various fields in Samoa.

By the way, the most recent volunteer who arrived in February, Ms. Takano, is a Japanese language education specialist. I am glad to report to you that a Japanese language course was re-opened at the University of Samoa under her guidance.

The other day, I visited Alaoa Water Treatment Plant. I would like to express my respect for the work of the Samoa Water Authority, providing clean water to Samoan people. This treatment plant alone provides about 60 percent of water which the people who live in Apia utilise.

There, as well, I could see the footprints of cooperation from Japan. In January, water engineering experts from Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture, located at the southern tip of Japan, was working hand-in-hand with their counterparts in SWA to eliminate non-revenue water. The non-revenue water rate, which once exceeded 70%, has fallen to below 50% thanks to their efforts. I feel proud of the results of such cooperation.

Do you know where the garbage goes?

Two weeks ago, I visited the waste landfill site in Tafaigata. I also took a ferry to visit the Vaia'ata disposal site on Savai'i Island, together with waste disposal experts from nine Pacific Island countries, including Samoa. JICA experts have been working on improving the conditions of waste disposal sites in Samoa since 2002, and now their experience is being expanded into a regional technical cooperation project aimed at improving waste disposal situation in those nine Pacific countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These people-to-people exchanges, which have already been widely carried out, are the basis for national-level exchanges between Japan and Samoa.

Japan and the Pacific Island countries have been holding leaders summits every three years since 1997. These summit meetings, called PALM, are meetings for leaders of 19 island countries and regions to discuss common issues between Japan and these countries.

In July 2024, the 10th summit, PALM10, was held in Tokyo. Then-Prime Minister Kishida from Japan was one of the co-chairs of the meeting. Prime Minister Fiamē attended from Samoa.

Japan hopes to strengthen the PALM process through true partnership, and further strengthen relations with Pacific Island countries, including Samoa, based on "mutual trust and respect".

Japan strongly supports the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent adopted by the PIF countries in 2022.

At PALM10, discussions were held in line with this strategy, and the Leaders' Declaration and Action Plan were adopted.

As noted in the discussions, Climate change is the biggest security threat facing countries in the region.

In response to this, The Pacific Climate Resilience Initiative was announced, which focuses on strengthening disaster prevention, promoting decarbonization, supporting the efforts of island countries themselves. In Samoa, Japan is cooperating in reducing emissions in the transport sector through a UNDP-affiliated project to promote the use of EVs. By “resilience” we are not only talking about making key infrastructure strong so that they can withstand earthquakes and tsunamis. In our technical cooperation through PCCC (Pacific Climate Change Centre) under SPREP, we are working to introduce an innovative insurance scheme that makes it easier for disaster victims to receive insurance payments once they are hit.

Japan and Samoa are neighbors. We both share the Pacific Ocean. As in its name, “peace” should prevail in this ocean. It is essential for the people of Japan and the Pacific Island countries, including Samoa, that this ocean remain peaceful, stable, and open.

Japan and Samoa share a common worldview that multilateralism is an important pillar of national security and that we should strengthen an international order based on the rule of law.

Japan and Samoa have already cooperated closely in various multilateral forums such as the United Nations. We would like to continue to work together with the people of Samoa to maintain and strengthen a free and open international order based on the rule of law.

With this spirit, I look forward to working closely with all of you to deepen our partnership and friendship.

Fa’afetai tele lava, soifua ma ia manuia.