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**Speech by H.E. Mr. Takuji Hanatani, Ambassador of Japan, at the Send-Off Reception for  
Pacific LEADS Program Scholarship Recipients**

Friday 19 August 2016, 6:00p.m., at 337 Princes Road, Suva  
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Her Excellency Ms. Reteta Rimon-Nikuata, High Commissioner of  
the Republic of Kiribati,

Mr. Emanuel Blessing, Chargé d’Affaires, High Commission of the  
Republic of Vanuatu,

Permanent Secretaries & Fiji Government Officials,

Pacific LEADS Program Scholarship Recipients,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bula Vinaka, Kam-Na-Mauri, Gudfala Evening, Good Evening and  
Konbanwa.

First of all, I extend my congratulations to all Fijians present here on your Sevens team’s golden performance at the Rio 2016 Olympics. History is created. The Japanese team toppled Sevens giants New Zealand in pool play and battled the Fijians in the semifinals but it was not enough. You might remember, this is not just a one-off performance. In the 15s Rugby World Cup last year, the Brave Blossoms created the upset of the tournament by defeating the Springboks. Nevertheless, we will be stronger in both the codes next time as we will build on our strengths while being the hosts of the 2019 Rugby World Cup as well as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate the 10 Fijians, 4 I-Kiribati and 3 Ni-Vanuatu recipients of the Pacific Leaders' Educational Assistance (LEADS) Program scholarship awards. As the name suggests, this is a training program for young leaders in the Pacific. Twenty four other young leaders from Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea and Tonga will be joining you in Japan. You have been chosen after a thorough selection process to embark on this once in a lifetime opportunity. Under this scholarship program, you will pursue Master's Degree studies at some of the top Japanese universities, which includes internships at public and private institutions in Japan during term breaks. One hundred young leaders from the Pacific will be given such scholarships by Japan for the next three years.

I urge you to always remember that while you are in Japan you will be Ambassadors of your countries and being the first batch of students you will be leading the pathway for future recipients. As such, your conduct will impress upon both, the Japanese people as well as the integrity of the Pacific LEADS Program. Please try to experience and enjoy the culture and lifestyle of Japan and its people. Cultivate friendships within academia and beyond, as this could well become your long lasting bond with Japan.

On your return you will be expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of your countries. By looking at the range and depth of studies the recipients have chosen, I have no doubt that the Pacific-LEADS graduates will be a significant addition to their national human capital, in line with strengthening the nation building efforts of Pacific Island Countries.

It was at the PALM7, that the Prime Minister of Japan announced to launch the Pacific-LEADS Program. This was based on the collective recognition and commitment by the leaders on the need to train young generations who would play important roles in creating the future of their countries. Today, it is my honour to state that in line with such aspirations of our leaders, we are able to deliver real results. The inaugural batch of Pacific-LEADS scholarship recipients present here this evening is a concrete example that the PALM Process is effectively and successfully making accomplishments. The Pacific-LEADS Program is a true example of the transformation from 'policy to practicality'.

In concluding, I extend my best wishes to all the Pacific-LEADS scholarship recipients. As this is just the beginning, I am confident that the Pacific-LEADS Program will strengthen friendship between the people and governments of Japan and Pacific Island Countries.

**Vinaka Vakalevu, Ko Rabwa, Tank-You-Tumas, Thank You and Arigato Gozaimasu.**

**The End.**