

Speech by H.E. Mr. Takuji Hanatani, Ambassador of Japan, at the Handing Over Ceremony for “The Project for Construction of a Cargo/Passenger Vessel” funded by the Government of Japan

Wednesday, 9 December 2015, 8:00 a.m. at Nippon Wharf, Tuvalu

Governor General of Tuvalu, His Excellency Sir Iakoba Taea Italeli and the First Lady Madam Koling Italeli,

Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Maatia Toafa,

Speaker of Parliament, Honourable Otinielu Tauteleimalae Tausi,

Minister for Communications and Transport, Honourable Monise Laafai,

Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, Honourable Namoliki Sualiki Neemia,

Honourable Cabinet Ministers & Honourable Members of Parliament,

Senior Government Officials,

Distinguished Guests & Ladies and Gentlemen,

Talofa, Good Morning and Ohayo Gozaimasu.

I wish to thank the people and Government of Tuvalu for the warm hospitality provided to me and my colleague during our stay here.

This is my second visit to Tuvalu. The first time was August last year when I came to present my credentials as

the new Ambassador of Japan to the Governor General His Excellency Sir Italeli.

Today, I am greatly honoured to hand over the newly built marine vessel, 'Nivaga III' to the government and people of Tuvalu. I am pleased to say that this is the second vessel that Japan provides Tuvalu after 'Manu Folau'. The Government of Japan has provided funding worth eighteen million (AU\$18M) Australian Dollars for this project which is implemented under its Grant Aid Programme.

Tuvalu is comprised of nine main atolls dispersed across considerable distances making maritime transportation indispensable. People rely entirely on sea transport for inter-island transfers of passengers and cargo. As food, household items, fuel and other basic needs are shipped from Funafuti to the outer islands, the people of Tuvalu value the importance of vessels as lifelines.

Nivaga III succeeds the British-funded Nivaga II, which has served the people of Tuvalu for 27 years. We look forward to the greater potential of Nivaga III and its practical accomplishments in serving the people of Tuvalu. New features include its roll-on/ roll-off capability, making it easier to transport not only cargo but also heavy machinery which will further contribute towards Tuvalu's development. 'Nivaga

III' is built to meet international standards so that it can navigate to any foreign country.

It is also encouraging to see that this project is aligned with the Tuvalu Government's National Development Framework. The implementation of such assistance in line with Tuvalu's development aspirations is fundamental to Japan's Development Cooperation.

I take this opportunity to highlight that 'Nivaga III' is of national importance to this country and from today it becomes a national asset of Tuvalu. The onus now rests with the people and Government of Tuvalu to take ownership of the vessel and provide the care and maintenance it needs. The maintenance and care are not free. You need to set aside special budget for the maintenance and care of the vessel. On the other hand, regular maintenance can save a lot of money in the long term and secure the longevity of Nivaga III.

I discussed this matter with Honourable Toafa, the Acting Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Economic Development. He does understand the importance of the regular maintenance of not only Nivaga III but also of any infrastructure investment and the cost it incurs. So, please rest assured, you are in safe hands.

I conclude with confidence that this project will further strengthen the friendship between the people and governments of Japan and Tuvalu.

May the 'Nivaga III' continue to contribute towards the building of a brighter future for the people of Tuvalu.

Last but not the least, I convey my best wishes for a safe and joyous festive season to His Excellency the Governor General, the Government and people of Tuvalu.

Thank You, Fakafetai Lasi and Arigato Gozaimasu.

THE END.