

Mauri and Good Afternoon

I warmly welcome you all. This is the first time I am welcoming His Excellency Mr. Tebuai Uai High Commissioner of Kiribati to the Republic of Fiji to my residence and I extend my best wishes for his term in Fiji, which he has newly started.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Japan, I have the honour to formalize with His Excellency Mr. Tebuai Uai, Japan's assistance to Kiribati, under its Economic and Social Development Programme or ESDP.

I am very pleased to say that through this ESDP, Japan will provide funding assistance to the Government of Kiribati worth 500 million Japanese Yen or approximately 5.5 million Australian Dollars for the procurement of a Fish collection vessel for the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource Development (MFMRD). This project was requested by the Honourable Tatebo Nakara, former Minister of MFMRD at the bilateral fisheries consultation

between the Fishery agency of Japan and MFMRD. The project will boost the Ministry's support for the people's livelihoods through the fisheries sector developments in helping achieve Kiribati 20 year vision (KV20). I am pleased to see that the formalization of this project today is a tangible materialization of the commitment made between the fisheries authorities of our two countries.

Despite Kiribati having many outer islands spread across its very large EEZ, to date there hasn't been any specific vessel assigned for the transportation of fish and seafood caught by outer island fishermen to the capital, Tarawa, where the demand of fish and seafood is greatest.

This has unfortunately resulted in many outer island fishermen halting trade with Tarawa and international markets. This is because the time constraints and inadequate cold storage during transportation deteriorated the quality of their catch which at times had to be discarded. Based on the difficulties faced by the fisheries community, I am happy to say that the fish collection vessel which will be provided through this project will enable timely and efficient transportation of high quality fish caught in the

outer islands to Tarawa. This will facilitate access of such fisheries products to domestic and international markets for the outer island fishermen and create a value chain. Furthermore, it will provide an alternative income and livelihoods opportunity to the people of the outer islands, who are heavily dependent on the copra industry.

Through this ESDP grant, Japan hopes to help sustain the livelihoods of outer island fishermen and contribute to food security in wider Kiribati. The vessel will also be used for sustainable fisheries management resource surveys.

I am pleased to highlight that this ESDP funding for Kiribati is also aligned with Japan's action under the Japan-Pacific Bond Policy or KIZUNA Policy, announced by Mr. SUGA Yoshihide, then Prime Minister of Japan, at the PALM9, held in July 2021. Such harmonization of our assistance with Kiribati's development aspirations is key to Japan's Development Cooperation with Kiribati.

Over the years, Japan has been providing continued support to the Government of Kiribati and we are pleased that we have strengthened our friendship through cooperation for enhancement of public utilities and infrastructure with projects for Nippon Causeway,

Betio Ports, electric power supply as well as provision of equipment for health and medical services, special vehicles, as well as farming and aquacultural equipment to the agricultural and fisheries sectors respectively. We have also implemented various training programs and awarded scholarships to the people of Kiribati for human resource exchange and capacity building. In addition to our bilateral engagement with the Government of Kiribati, we are enhancing our cooperation through multilateral partners such as UNICEF and WHO, to provide support to Kiribati including other Pacific Island Countries Areas of collaboration last year include strengthening immunization capacity, enhancing COVID-19 preparedness and response efforts. Furthermore, the Government of Japan has donated 56,000 doses of Oxford – AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine manufactured in Japan, to strengthen Kiribati's vaccination rollout.

We look forward to working together with the Government of Kiribati and the procurement agency namely, Japan International Cooperation System (JICS), for the successful implementation of this important project.

Last but not least, I take this opportunity to convey my deepest condolences and sympathies to the people of Kiribati who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 as well as for all the pain and suffering caused by the pandemic. I praise the leadership of His Excellency President Taneti MAAMAU and the Kiribati Government for effectively guiding the nation through these difficult times. We are all in this together.

I conclude with confidence that this project will further strengthen friendship between the Governments and peoples of Japan and Kiribati.

Ko-Rabwa (ko-rabba) and Thank You.

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