

The Honorable Minister for Local Government, Education,  
Heritage and Arts Ms. Premila Devi Kumar,  
The CEO for Levuka Town Council Mr. Josese Rakuita,  
Government Officials,  
Distinguished guests, Media Partners, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Bula Vinaka, Namaste and Very Good morning to you all.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Honorable Minister and Levuka Town Council for hosting this Handover Ceremony as well as for the warm hospitality extended to us today.

On behalf of the Government and people of Japan, it is my honor to handover a new Excavator and a Tip Truck to the Levuka City Council, in the presence of the Honorable Minister, worth Three Hundred and Three Thousand Fijian Dollars (\$303,417) for ‘The Project for Provision of Heavy Machinery to Levuka Town Council’. The Government of Japan funded this project under its Grassroots Grant Assistance Program or GGP.

We, at the Embassy of Japan think highly of Honorable Minister's initiative on enhancing environment friendly solid waste management systems which is being implemented in the communities. I am happy to say that this project is in line with such leading efforts of the Fijian Government. I hope that the heavy machinery handed over today will assist the Town Council and people of Ovalau in improving its waste management standards. The heavy machinery will also enable the Council to enhance its general haulage, drainage, infrastructure and construction works around the Island of Ovalau.

I formalized this project with the Hon. Minister on March 7. I am very pleased that within only 3 months I am able to hand over the heavy machinery to the Levuka City Council, in the presence of the Honorable Minister today. I express my gratitude to the Ministry of Local Government and the Levuka Town Council for their efforts in ensuring the timely completion of this project.

On the 7th of this month, the Japanese Foreign Minister Mr. HAYASHI Yoshimasa visited Fiji and met the Honourable Prime Minister Bainimarama. At the beginning of the meeting, the

Honourable Prime Minister eloquently stated that “we are now enjoying the new era of co-operation”. Both, the Honourable Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hayashi mutually agreed to further strengthen Fiji-Japan bilateral relations. Through this visit, Minister Hayashi learnt first-hand that Japan's support is being effectively utilized in assisting with the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and he observed that Fiji is recovering strongly and getting back lives to normalcy. Foreign Minister Hayashi's visit is a new milestone in the growth of Japan-Fiji relations.

The heavy machines which is being handed over today is the first Grassroots Grant Assistance from Japan to Fiji after Foreign Minister Hayashi's visit. I am proud to say that this project supports the Fijian Government's efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 11, which aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

I would like to take this opportunity to praise the efforts of the Honorable Minister, for her leading role in improving waste management practices, and enhancing environmental actions in urban areas and municipalities.

I wish to highlight that since 1990, we have implemented 415 GGP projects which are approximately worth Thirty One Million US Dollars (USD 31 million). To date, we have successfully assisted respective Fijian Municipalities through the provision of 12 garbage trucks and 5 excavators.

Japan has also assisted municipal councils in developing their solid waste management practice through the implementation of Technical Cooperation project, titled J-PRISM. This four-year project is coming to an end towards the end of this September and is currently in the process to finalize the Councils' solid waste master plans and establish a system to manage and monitor progress of its implementation. In addition, the waste audit survey has been conducted in Suva and Lautoka and its report will be available soon to be referred for utilizing policy-making in environmental management sector in Fiji. If there are high potential needs, we will continue to actively support the local governments, under the auspices of the Ministry.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

As the Ambassador of Japan to Fiji, I would like to take this opportunity to affirm that the Government of Japan will continue

to strongly support Fiji in the future, which is also the reiteration of the Foreign Minister Hayashi's statement to the Honorable Prime Minister, during their meeting earlier this month.

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

Thank You, Vinaka Vakalevu, Dhanyavaadh and Arigato Gozaimasu. **END**