**Address by H.E. Mr. TAZAWA Hiroki, First Secretary, Official Development Assistance Unit, Embassy of Japan,**

**At the Handover Ceremony for Namalata Central School**

 On 24 July 2023, Vunisea, Island of Kadavu

Honorable , Minister for Education

Mr. , Head of School for Namalata Central School

Traditional Leaders

Government Officials

Distinguished Guests

Members of the Media,

Students

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yadra Vinaka and Good Morning.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Minister for Education, his officials, the and Namalata Central School for the hospitality and warm welcome extended to me and my colleague today.

On behalf of the People and Government of Japan, it is my honor to handover a newly constructed and furnished three classroom building to the Minister for Education on behalf of Namalata Central School. We provided funding worth three hundred and twenty six thousand Fiji Dollars (FJ$326,154 FJD) for this project, which is implemented through its Grassroots Grant Assistance Scheme.

**Please allow me to explain how we assisted the school**

In 2020, TC Harold severely damaged schools on Kadavu Island and this devastation occurred while the recovery and reconstruction from TC Keni was still underway. In its effort to assist the people and children of Kadavu, the Ministry of Education and the Embassy of Japan worked in collaboration and identified Namalata Central School as one of the most affected schools in Kadavu. In addition to the cyclone damages, the existing buildings were not conducive for learning but was crowded and had no proper furniture. In recognizing the problems and hardship faced by the school, the Embassy of Japan in Fiji decided to assist the school.

I sympathize with the people of Kadavu as they have had to face the brunt of severe cyclones in quick successions, in addition to the hardships and loss of livelihoods brought about by COVID-19 pandemic. I respect your resilience against such difficulties. The fact that this project was completed after such a difficult time, speaks volumes of the resilience, hard work and dedication of the people of Kadavu.

Today, I am pleased to say that we have been able to provide assistance in addressing the difficulties faced by Namalata Central School and its nearby communities. The new facility will be crucial in delivering quality education to the students. It is reassuring to see that the new building is built to such standards which will enable it to serve the community as an evacuation center during emergencies and natural disasters.

Moreover, this is in line with the Fiji Government’s National development objectives in leaving no one behind and complements SDG 4, *“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning*.

I am very happy to say that since 1990, Japan has been providing assistance to grassroots communities in Fiji, by implementing more than 423 projects under its Grassroots Grant Assistance scheme, worth approximately 32 million US dollars. In the last 10 years, Japan’s assistance towards the Education sector in Fiji is approximately $12 million USD (approx. $26million FJD).

Since 2020, The Government of Japan has funded six rehabilitation projects for six schools in Kadavu worth approximately $5 Million Fiji Dollars (5 Million FJD).

I take this opportunity to commend the Fiji Government, the Honorable Minister and his team for the continued efforts to improve the Education sector in Fiji. Your leadership and work towards Education sector in Fiji is applauding and I hope we can continue this friendship.

**Students of Namalata Central School**

A powerful tool that one can have to be successful in life is Education. Education has become even more important now and it can take you across the world if you pursue it with due diligence and determination. I urge you to work hard and make your parents, guardians and teachers proud. Make use of the improved learning facility and furniture and do take care of it for the sake of future students of Namalata Central. I wish you all the best in your education.

Finally, I would also like to thank the Engineers of the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services for their role in the successful completion of this project. We wouldn’t have completed the project without your technical advice and professional assessment.

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

Vinaka Vakalevu and Thank You.

**The End.**