

Fiji independence day

Fiji and Japan, moving together in unity for our mutual prosperity

Isikeli Mataitoga
AMBASSADOR OF FIJI

It is with great pleasure and honor on this memorable occasion that I extend on behalf of H.E. President of the Republic of Fiji Epeli Nailatikau, the government and people of Fiji, warm greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko and the members of the Imperial Household, as well as to the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and people of this great nation, Japan. I also extend warm greetings and "bula vinaka" to all Fijian nationals and friends of Fiji in Japan.



Steady reforms: Fiji's Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama presents the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon with a copy of the 2013 Fiji Constitution on Sept. 28 at U.N. Headquarters in New York. EMBASSY OF FIJI

Bilateral relation

The government and people of Fiji are grateful for the warm and cordial relations that existed between our two countries in the last 43 years since we established diplomatic relations. Japan has assisted Fiji and its people in so many ways, through the overseas development assistance program and through private organizations from Japan undertaking projects in Fiji, all to the direct benefit of the Fijian people.

Japan's assistance

Japan remains one of Fiji's major development partners in its economic and social sectors. Japan's ODA program extended through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) continues to provide valuable assistance in terms of human resource development, grass-roots human security programs focusing on environment-related projects, and education schemes in Fiji.

Close to 100 JICA experts and 500 Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) have worked and currently work in Fiji in the various fields of technical cooperation.

Each year, an average of 30 to 40 students have the opportunity to study in Japan under the government of Japan's scholarship cooperation. In time of natural disaster after cyclone or flooding, the Japanese government has always been generous in giving assistance to Fiji.

Economic cooperation

We agree with Japan that trade and economic cooperation are key elements to advance sustainable development. In this regard consultations are currently taking place for the development of a bilateral framework setting out guidelines for deepening trade and investment in specific sectors of the Fiji economy. This will further deepen and enhance

Japan-Fiji trade and investment relations. We also acknowledge with gratitude Japan's resolve to deepen its bilateral relations with Fiji, as evident in the recent commitment to explore new ways to increase trade and economic cooperation between our two countries.

Fiji's trade ties with Japan are growing, with the annual bilateral trade now at ¥10 billion in March 2013. We have recorded some fluctuations in our balance of trade with Japan for several months leading to June 2013. We expect this relation to grow further in the coming years.

The economic reforms undertaken by Fiji have produced remarkable positive mid-term results. The key reforms now under way in Fiji including reforms of land management being the basic resource for Fiji's economic growth when successfully completed will be the catalysts for promising economic growth in Fiji.

Constitutional reforms

Since 2007, Fiji has been undergoing major political, economic and social reforms, to reposition itself in the global community. The most significant of which is the promulgation of a new constitution. In that context, 2013 will go down in the history of Fiji as a watershed year, in which great strides in building nationhood were achieved. On Sept. 7, H.E. President of Republic of Fiji Nailatikau promulgated the new constitution of Fiji, and in the words of Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama, when addressing the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York:

"The 2013 constitution enshrines principles that are at the heart of all the world's great liberal democracies — an independent judiciary, a secular state and a wide range of civil, political and socioeconomic rights. It recognizes the indigenous peoples of Fiji and their customary practices; protects the rights of the predominantly landowners and also their tenants; demands accountability and transparency from government officials, builds strong and independent institutions and replaces our old weighted electoral system with one based on the principles of one person, one vote, one value."

The 2013 constitution mandates that elections must take place no later than Sept. 30, 2014. We thank Japan for promising to assist Fiji in this major undertaking.

Global citizen

Our nation is a beautiful island of tranquillity in the midst of worldwide upheavals. We have a compassionate and resilient people of many races who have

learned to live together over the years despite their differences.

Fiji's commitment to being a good global citizen is manifested through its ongoing engagement with the United Nations and the leading roles it plays in advocating the voice of the smaller island states and least developed nations of the world in various world forums. This is being significantly attested by its decision to take on the mantle of chairing the Group of 77 & China for the year 2013, thus, advocat-

ing the fact that Fiji embraces its rights as an equal member of the United Nations guided by the core values of its foreign policies of respect for each other's sovereignty, equality, fairness and openness.

Fiji supports world peace and in the peaceful resolution of all disputes between nations. In this regard, we support international peace keeping missions in trouble spots around the globe under the U.N. banner, as currently evident in our commitment to

UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force) in the Golan Heights. Our servicemen and servicewomen have served with distinction in U.N. missions and some have paid the ultimate price for their services. I pay special tribute to them for their selfless sacrifice in pursuit of world peace.

As we celebrate today, we as a nation have every reason to be grateful to the almighty God for his tender mercies, which has enabled us to come thus far, a nation poised for greater things.

May I extend our sincere appreciation to the government of Japan and its people for its un-

wavering development provision and cooperation, to all our corporate sponsors, the Japan-Fiji Friendship Society, friends of Fiji in Japan and members of the Fijian community for their support and genuine commitment to the promotion of good will between Japan and Fiji.

Finally, my sincere gratitude to The Japan Times, whose generous support we have always received over the years and for allowing us this tremendous opportunity to celebrate Fiji's 43rd anniversary of independence with its readers.

May God bless Fiji-Japan relations.

Congratulations in Celebration of the 43rd National Anniversary of the Republic of Fiji

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