

Samoa national day

Lifting spirits through sports and entertainment

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Today, on the occasion of the 49th anniversary of Samoa regaining its full independence, I have the singular honor, on behalf of Samoa's head of state, His Highness TuiAtua Tupua Tamasese Efi, the government and the people of Samoa, to extend to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and to the government and the people of Japan my sincere respect and best wishes at this very difficult time following the catastrophic devastation caused by the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan on March 11.

I offer also my deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones, and my heartfelt sympathies for those who suffered serious injuries and those



who have lost their homes and their livelihoods. The thoughts and prayers of the leaders and the people of Samoa are with you all as you undertake the monumental and heartbreaking task of rebuilding your lives, your communities, and your country. The people of Japan are no strangers to dealing effectively with natural and man-made disasters on an epic scale. This time too, people throughout the world have watched in great admiration the calm, disciplined and efficient way that the people of Japan have been dealing with the brutal impact of this disaster. There is no doubt that the indomitable spirit and the renowned resilience of the Japanese people, together with strong support from the international community, will see Japan emerge stronger from this catastrophe.

From recent experiences, the people of Samoa are intimately familiar with the devastating impact of a major earthquake and tsunami. In September 2009, Samoa was struck by a

magnitude 8.3 earthquake, which generated a powerful tsunami that reached heights of over 14 meters on land. Whole villages were completely wiped out and 143 people perished, a significant loss of life in a population of a little under 200,000 people. With over 20 percent of Samoa's gross domestic product (GDP) needed to pay for the rehabilitation and recovery costs, Samoa's economy contracted into negative growth territory. However, with the assistance from the international community, especially Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China, excellent recovery has been made and the country is back on solid ground.

Apart from monetary donations and messages of condolence and best wishes to the leaders and the people of Japan, Samoa has been looking at ways to help lift the spirits and the morale of the people of Japan at this very difficult time. Accordingly, Samoa's national rugby team (Manu Samoa) has decided to play its game against Ja-

pan (Brave Blossoms) in Tokyo on July 2 in the Pacific Nations rugby tournament, also involving Fiji and Tonga, even though this tournament, which was scheduled to be held in Japan in July, had been shifted to Fiji following the March 11 disaster.

In the same spirit, Samoa's Embassy in Tokyo has decided not to host the usual diplomatic reception to mark Samoa's Independence Day. Instead, in conjunction with the Samoans who have made Japan their home, as well as some Samoan students studying in Japan and some Samoans playing professional rugby in Japan, a Samoan entertainment group will travel to the evacuation center at Kisai High School in Saitama, housing evacuees from Futaba town, located near the Fukushima nuclear power plant, and present exciting Samoa dances and songs on June 5.

I would like to conclude by thanking The Japan Times for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts with its distinguished readers.