

Her Excellency Hilda C. Heine, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and First Gentleman Tomas Kijiner,

Honorable Kalani Kaneko, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Mrs. Kaneko,

Honorable Ministers and their spouses,

Honorable Isaac Zackhras, Vice Speaker of Nitijela and Mrs. Zackhras,

Honorable Members of the Nitijela,

Honorable Witten Philippon, Associate Chief Justice of High Court,

Iroij Lanny Kabua, Chairman and other members of the Council of Iroij, and other traditional leaders,

Mayors and Council Members of the Local Governments,

Reverend Belwin Langidrik, Uliga, United Church of Christ,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Officials of the various Government Ministries, Organizations and Enterprises,

Representatives of Business Community in Majuro,

My fellow Japanese,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening and Iakwe in jota.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome and thank you all in joining us tonight to celebrate the 64th birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, on the eve of His Majesty's actual birthday. In the past year, the Emperor has actively engaged in cultural and social-welfare activities throughout Japan and made a goodwill visit to Indonesia last June.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to share my heartfelt appreciation for the kind words and condolences from Marshallese people and the Government for damages and victims caused by the Noto Peninsular Earthquake which occurred on New Year's Day.

And here I would like to express my sincere sympathy for the damages caused by the high and king tide and drought that has been influencing people's life in the Marshall Islands in current season. I hope the thirteen (13) back-up generators our Government handed over last month to Majuro Water and Sewer Company in partnership with UNDP, will be fully utilized in this difficult time.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Last year marked the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the RMI and Japan. The visit of then President David Kabua to Japan and the opening of the new Embassy in Tokyo on December 9, which falls on the exact day when the relations established back in 1988. We look forward to fruitful exchanges between our two people developed further for the 40th anniversary in year 2028.

In the past year, the Government of Japan has provided necessary support to the RMI, such as school buses to three schools in Majuro, FRP boats and other equipment to assist measures against oil spills by the Environment Protection Agency, among others. This year, we expect to complete construction of the Emergency Operation Center, installation of solar electricity generation system for KAJUR both in Ebeye, and construction of Sea Patrol Headquarters Building in Majuro, and arrival of passenger and cargo ship from Japan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In July this year, the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM 10) will be held in Tokyo. We wholeheartedly welcome the President Heine's

participation in the Meeting. Last week in Suva, the PALM Interim Ministerial Meeting was held and Minister KANEKO took part and had a fruitful bilateral meeting as well with Ms. Yoko KAMIKAWA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan. Japan is committed to support the development of the region, particularly in line with 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since Japan is the only country to have suffered from the war-time atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we Japanese understand and shares the nuclear legacy, the sentiments and suffering the Marshallese people have and therefore how Marshallese feels toward the discharge of diluted water treated by the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, which was damaged by the Great Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami back in 2011.

Last year, our Government dispatched two missions to the RMI to explain the situation at high level of the RMI Government and concerned NGOs and citizens, including through media. Based on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s Comprehensive Report of last July which

concluded that the discharge of the ALPS treated water will have a negligible radiological impact on people and the environment, the discharge began in August. The independent monitoring by the IAEA Task Force in October, which an RMI expert representing the Pacific Island nations also participated, confirmed the conclusion of the July IAEA report on the discharge to date. The Government of Japan, including through myself and the Embassy will continue dialogues with the RMI on this matter in a timely and transparent manner based on scientific evidence with the nuclear legacy sentiments of Marshallese in our mind.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the spread of COVID-19 is lessened, bilateral cooperation has been once again revitalized. Last year, visits of missions for recovery and repatriation of, and for paying tribute to war-time victims of Japan resumed. I would like to express here my sincere appreciation for Marshallese people's understanding and cooperation, including the management and preserving of the Majuro Peace Park in a good condition.

This year, Children Exchange Program with Micronesian Islands as part of Japan's youth exchange program under the PALM is to return as well,

under which many Marshallese kids will visit Japan, and you may see many young Japanese faces around town this summer. Japan Overseas Corporation Volunteers (JOCVs) has also been coming back to this shore since last year, working at PSS and Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and Utility.

The number of JOCVs is expected to increase this year to 11 in total, to work at Majuro hospital, MIR, WUTMI, EPA, elementary schools and as a Japanese teacher at CMI. I would also like to encourage many ambitious and capable Marshallese students to take advantage of opportunities offered by the Government of Japan, JICA and other institutions to study in Japan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I hope the friendly exchanges and cooperative relations between our two countries, which are connected with the Pacific Ocean, and whose exchange history goes back to more than 100 years ago, will become even more vigorous than ever before.

Kommol tata!

Now I would like to raise a glass for the happiness, peace and prosperity of people and the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and ever-lasting friendship between Japan and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Kanpai!