

(Provisional Translation)

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Japan Ministry of Defense

Keynote Speech by Defense Minister Kihara at the 2<sup>nd</sup> JPIDD

Your Royal Highness, the Crown Prince of Tonga Tupouto’a ‘Ulukalala, Your Excellency Tikoduadua, Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration of Fiji, Your Excellency Dr. Billy Joseph, Minister of Defence of Papua New Guinea, distinguished guests, good afternoon. Welcome to “the second Japan Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue,” JPIDD.

I am KIHARA Minoru, Defense Minister of Japan. I am delighted to welcome you to Japan and to convene this meeting in this beautiful season when cherry blossoms are just beginning to bloom.

The Pacific Islands Region, or the Blue Pacific Continent, is situated at the heart of continents such as North and South America, Eurasia, Australia, and indeed, is at the heart of us gathered here today. Our countries live by the sea, cherish it, and meet across it, to build mutual trust and weave bonds, or KIZUNA in Japanese.

Unfortunately, today, unilateral changes to the status quo by force or coercion, such attempts are prevailing worldwide including in the Indo-Pacific. We have observed the existing international order based on the rule of law being tested by a variety of challenges, and the security environment surrounding the Pacific Island Countries is also changing.

Let us recall however, that it is the Pacific Island Countries’ or your sea of islands. It is passed down from ancestors to future generations.

Previously, as Special Advisor to the Prime Minister, I chaired the “Pacific Island Countries Cooperation Promotion Conference” of the Government of Japan to promote cooperation between Japan and Pacific Island Countries ahead of “the 9th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting” or PALM9. There, I had discussions with leaders of many Pacific Island Countries on what needs to be done for the future of this region.

I know that the Pacific Islands Region is full of potential. Bright and courageous souls who have sailed into the vast ocean, embracing life with nature. Abundant natural resources such as seafood, agricultural products, and minerals. Not to mention a beautiful sea that attracts people from all over the world. Together with you all, and with such potential, Japan hopes to create a future where the Pacific Island Countries can continue to enjoy peace, stability, and prosperity.

In order to pass on peaceful days and abundant lives to our children and grandchildren, our sea must be free, open, and stable under an international order based on the rule of law.

Japan encapsulated this determination in its vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.” This vision aims to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific based on the rule of law, free from force or coercion, ensuring peace and prosperity in the region. A free, open and stable sea under the rule of law connects us and brings us abundance and prosperity. This sea must not divide us.

At the PALM 9, we underscored our “renewed and strengthened commitment to the importance of free, open and sustainable maritime order based on the rule of law that will contribute to peace, stability, resilience, prosperity, ocean health and resource sustainability of the region.” This commitment was reaffirmed at the PALM Ministerial Interim Meeting last month.

In order to realize this commitment, in addition to dialogue and communication, it is critically important for the Pacific Island Countries to enhance their capacity to maintain peace and stability of their region.

Yes, the future we are heading for is one where everyone enjoys peace, stability, and prosperity under an international order based on the rule of law. And I reiterate, the key players in guarding the order of this region are none other than the Pacific Island Countries yourselves.

### **【Cooperation Concept for United Security Efforts in the Pacific Islands Region】**

Under the “Pacific Bond (KIZUNA) Policy” announced at the previous PALM 9, we have steadily advanced cooperation with the Pacific Island Countries in an “ALL Japan” effort. As we strive to further advance cooperation in the field of defense and security with you all from the Pacific Islands Region, I would like to present three principles Japan holds.

#### **<Principle 1: Respecting the Centrality, Unity, and Ownership of the Pacific Island Countries>**

Firstly, we will respect the centrality, unity, and ownership of the Pacific Island Countries.

We uphold the centrality of the Pacific Island Countries. As guardians of order in the region, the Pacific Island Countries have the freedom and right to determine their own future, and we will protect that right alongside you.

Additionally, we will honor the unity of the Pacific Island Countries. The power of the Pacific Island Countries filled with potential can be maximized when they stand united, overcoming differences. The Pacific Island Countries are at a turning point in history, and it is a significant milestone for the PIF members to make their cherished values and visions heard in the form of the “2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.” Japan will strongly support efforts of the Pacific Island Countries to enhance their unity as the

Blue Pacific Continent.

Moreover, we will respect the ownership of the Pacific Island Countries. When Japan advances projects with the Pacific Island Countries, we will listen carefully to your needs and support your ability to protect your safe and prosperous life on your own.

For instance, Japan is contributing to capability enhancement necessary for the Pacific Island Countries through initiatives such as capacity building and the “Official Security Assistance (OSA)”, which is a new framework for non-reimbursable financial assistance to armed forces and other related organizations.

Through such efforts, we will contribute to the “Political Leadership and Regionalism” outlined in the “2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.”

**<Principle 2: Strengthening the Equal, Mutually Beneficial, and Supportive Relationships>**

Secondly, we will strengthen equal, mutually beneficial, and supportive relationships.

The relationships between the Pacific Island Countries and partner countries are not a fixed one like a donor and a recipient.

In particular, while bearing significant impacts of climate change, the Pacific Island Countries play a central role in leading international discussions on both mitigation and adaptation. Your experience provides the world with guiding principles for cooperation in addressing the common challenges of climate change.

Japan and the Pacific Island Countries share a sense of urgency on climate change. Dealing with various disasters such as typhoons, heavy rains exacerbated by climate change, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, etc., is an urgent common challenge. There are no borders when it comes to natural disasters.

We have been working together to address natural disasters. For instance, the large-scale volcanic eruption off the coast of Tonga’s Eua Island in 2022, Japan conducted international emergency relief activities along with Australia, New Zealand, and others. When Japan was struck by the Noto Peninsula Earthquake in January this year, we received messages of sympathy and expressions of support from you all, which encouraged us tremendously. By leveraging the know-how and lessons accumulated through disaster relief operations and other activities, the Ministry of Defense and the Self-Defense Forces will further strengthen cooperation on disaster response.

It is vital for us to discuss and exchange knowledge on addressing emerging challenges in influence operations including disinformation, as well as space and cyber domains, and adapting to emerging technologies such as AI, etc.

We will further deepen our KIZUNA with the Pacific Island Countries to forge equal, mutually beneficial and supportive relationships, through which we can understand each other’s challenges, learn from each other and seek solutions together.

As a part of such an effort, Japan will offer opportunities for junior military personnel from Tonga, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea who are keen to bear the future of their respected armed forces to study and train at Japan's National Defense Academy together with Japanese students.

We also believe our KIZUNA should be nurtured without leaving anyone behind. Based on such an approach, Japan conducted its first ever “Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)” seminar in the region last month, taking advancement of the opportunity to conduct a capacity building program in Fiji, so as to promote the WPS agenda together. To expand our collaboration in the field of WPS, we plan to hold a WPS seminar as part of the “Japan-Pacific Island Countries and Timor-Leste Ship Rider Cooperation Program” this year. We will strive to promote the WPS agenda together with you in a range of fields such as peacekeeping operations, maritime security, and disaster relief.

**<Principle 3: Supporting Collaboration between the Pacific Island Countries, Japan, and ASEAN>**

Thirdly, we will support collaboration between the Pacific Island Countries and ASEAN, as well as Timor-Leste, which will soon join ASEAN.

Issues faced by the Pacific Island Countries, such as maritime security, climate change, and disaster risk reduction and management, are also crucial for ASEAN. These issues are highlighted as areas of cooperation with regional countries in the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” or AOIP. I believe that we can develop more effective approaches that can contribute to resolving these issues by further promoting cooperation among the Pacific Island Countries, Japan, and ASEAN.

Japan would like to support bridging cooperation between the Pacific Island Countries and ASEAN where appropriate, working with the partner countries.

For example, last year, we organized the “Japan-Pacific Island Countries and Timor-Leste Ship Rider Cooperation Program” in conjunction with the “Japan-ASEAN Ship Rider Cooperation Program” for the first time ever. We are planning for the two events to be held together this year as well. We will continue to strongly support such collaboration between regions in the area of defense and security.

**<Coordination 1: Strengthening the Coordination between JPIDD and SPDMM>**

In addition, JPIDD will seek to strengthen two specific linkages.

Firstly, we will enhance coordination between JPIDD and regional frameworks for cooperation in the Pacific Islands Region, especially with the “South Pacific Defense Ministers’ Meeting (SPDMM).”

SPDMM serves as an important platform for security in the Pacific Islands Region, gathering defense ministers and officials from seven countries, including the three Pacific

Island Countries with military forces. Since 2022, Japan has been participating in SPDMM as an observer.

We aim to make JPIDD and SPDMM mutually complementary. While SPDMM focuses on intergovernmental meetings among defense authorities, JPIDD welcomes the participation from the Pacific Island Countries without armed forces as well, to discuss various security challenges in the Pacific Islands Region.

Given the increasingly complex security environment, where the lines between peace and conflict, military and non-military, are blurred, Japan believes that it is essential to coordinate traditional regional frameworks like SPDMM, and JPIDD, where diverse security challenges are discussed. This mutually complementary coordination is crucial to ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity in the Pacific Islands Region.

### **<Coordination 2: Strengthening the Coordination between JPIDD and PALM>**

Secondly, we will strengthen coordination between JPIDD and PALM.

Japan and the Pacific Island Countries have been advancing cooperation on various issues such as economic development and climate change through PALM, which is a meeting at the leaders' level. Based on Japan's Pacific Bond (KIZUNA) Policy announced at PALM 9 in 2021, during the first JPIDD, Japan stated its intention to promote cooperation among defense authorities through exchanges, such as port calls of vessels and stopovers of aircraft of the Japan Self-Defense Forces, and cooperation in human resources development in maritime security and disaster relief, among others.

Our bonds or KIZUNA in defense and security has steadily strengthened through initiatives such as port calls during the "Indo-Pacific Dispatch (IPD)," new capacity building programs in Fiji and Solomon Islands, and efforts to strengthen the law-enforcement capacity in collaboration with Japan Coast Guard and National Police Agency. Japan will make steady progress in its commitment to contribute to the peace, stability, and prosperity of the Pacific Island Countries in the areas of defense and security.

I am convinced that enhancing defense and security cooperation through JPIDD will make our KIZUNA with the Pacific Island Countries even more robust and solid, and thereby will contribute to the further development of PALM.

We would like to name these three principles and two coordination as "Cooperation Concept for United Security Efforts in the Pacific Islands Region."

Under this concept Japan aims to further advance defense and security cooperation in the Pacific Islands Region together with all of you. I hope this concept will further facilitate cooperation and collaboration to realize the future of peace, stability, and prosperity in the Pacific Islands Region.

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, and distinguished guests, we have gathered

here to pave the way for a better future for the Pacific Islands Region. JPIDD is a platform for sharing the challenges we each face, sharing wisdom, and fostering further cooperation and collaboration. I believe that by working together to address our common challenges, while connected by one ocean, we can achieve better results.

To ensure the ocean does not divide us, a free, open and stable sea under the international order based on the rule of law must be maintained. The JPIDD's theme of "Bridging the Blue Continent," encapsulates our message to nurture a free, open, and stable ocean, which bridges Japan, Pacific Island Countries, and all nations as the Blue Continent.

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, and distinguished guests, let us consolidate our efforts to hand over a safer and more prosperous world to the next generation and beyond. Thank you for your kind attention.