

Thank you very much for joining us this evening to celebrate the 68th Anniversary of the Japan Self-Defense Forces. Before anything else, I would like to emphasize that tonight's gathering is a salute to a golden age of our strategic partnership between Japan and the Philippines. I am convinced that this partnership continues to be successful with the new President, H.E. Ferdinand Marcos Jr., and his Administration, and my sincere appreciation goes to all of those who have contributed and worked hard to get us where we are now.

Importantly, I would like to congratulate General FAUSTINO on his appointment as the Senior Undersecretary and Officer-In-Charge (OIC) of the Department of National Defense (DND) for the new administration. The Government of Japan welcomes that the coming Secretary of Defense will be served by a military official with many years of experience and outstanding knowledge in the field of defense for the Philippines.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While the world was still recovering from the pandemic, Russia's aggression against Ukraine broke out. We all have to bear in mind that no country or region in the world can or should shrug this off as "someone else's problem." It is a situation that shakes the very foundations of the international order.

Turning our eyes to the South China Sea, is international law really being respected? Neither international law, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to which all relevant parties agreed after years of dialogue and tireless efforts, nor the 2016 award rendered by the Arbitral Tribunal under the said Convention, is being complied with.

Meanwhile in the East China Sea, where Japan is located, we also see the continuation of unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, which is in violation of international law. Japan is taking a firm stance against such attempts.

Japan has reinforced our commitments to peace and stability of the region in order to achieve a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP).

Considering that the regional security environment is becoming more testing and uncertain at a remarkably faster speed, what is important is close cooperation among like-minded countries bonded by such universal values and principles as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. This is why the Philippines is one of our most reliable partners.

We are pleased to note that the bilateral relations between Japan and the Philippines have gone to great lengths in a variety of fields, including security and defense cooperation. From rescue and relief operations, to capacity-building activities, as well as knowledge and equipment

transfers, Japan stands ready to come to the aid of the Philippines in times of need. In fact, Japan Self-Defense Forces have officially participated in numerous exercises and provided trainings to AFP, with the view to strengthening our cooperation mainly on Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) missions with fellow participants.

Looking closer at the progress we have made in this area, the Japanese government transferred five TC-90 (tee-see-ninety) aircraft by 2018, as well as provided UH-1H spare parts to the Philippine Air force. In the meantime, back in 2020, the Department of National Defense and Mitsubishi Electric Corporation concluded a contract for the delivery of four Air Surveillance Radar Systems to the Philippine Air Force, to improve the Philippines' warning and surveillance capabilities. Significantly, this was the first transfer of completed defense equipment from Japan to a foreign country. I understand that the construction is progressing smoothly as scheduled and hope to see the brand new radar placed soon this year.

Speaking of the development of our security and defense cooperation, it is indispensable to highlight what we have achieved at the inaugural Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting (“2+2”) held in Tokyo last April. Specifically, our two governments, along with the participation of former Secretary LORENZANA, agreed upon strengthening defense capabilities, promoting transfer of defense equipment and technology, and facilitating cooperation, such as exercises between the two forces. We

expect to see more of these as we have now entered the second decade of our strategic partnership.

The Japanese government strongly expects to strengthen defense cooperation with the Philippines' new administration under the leadership of President MARCOS and coming Defense Secretary FAUSTINO, in order to achieve a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) based on the rule of law.

Last but not least, I would like to touch upon the overall bilateral relations between Japan and the Philippines. At the telephone talk between Japanese Prime Minister Kishida and President Marcos on May 20, Prime Minister Kishida invited President Marcos to visit Japan at an early stage. In response, President Marcos agreed with Prime Minister Kishida to discuss ways to further strengthen the bilateral relations between the two countries and realize peace and prosperity of the region at an early stage.

As you all know, Japan and the Philippines have a very close relationship in a wide range of fields, such as diplomacy, economy and culture. Japan is the top investor for the Philippines, one of the top traders, and the top ODA partner of the Philippines. For the ODA projects currently underway, please see the pamphlet distributed today. With the previous administration, Japan has delivered everything it promised to.

Japan's cooperation through ODA includes such areas as railways, roads, bridges, airports, seaports, maritime law enforcement, disaster prevention, health and medical care, agriculture, fisheries, education, human resource development, space development, Mindanao Peace Process, Marawi reconstruction, grassroots projects, Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, Disaster Emergency Assistance, and COVID-19 Countermeasures. These major projects are currently underway, along with the support of Japan, amounting to 1.4 trillion pesos.

Prime Minister Kishida has already promised President Marcos that the Government of Japan will continue to cooperate in a wide range of areas. Once the Metro Manila Subway is completed, Quezon City and NAIA will be connected in 35 minutes. MRT3 already provides regular services and significantly contributes to Manila's civil life.

The Davao City Bypass Road, currently under construction, will greatly foster economic development of the City of Davao and the Mindanao area and also bring great benefits to its civil society.

Built by ODA, PCG's 97m-class flagships, “BRP Teresa Magbanua” and “BRP Melchora Aquino,” as well as 10 state-of-the-art 44m-class Vessels have already been contributing to the safety of the Philippine Sea.

Flood control facilities in IMUS City, Cagayan de Oro City, Tagaloan City, Ormoc City are beginning to control potential floods.

This year, the Philippine government has significantly relaxed foreign investment restrictions. Against the backdrop of such improvement in the investment environment, we have great expectations for further expansion of investment and trade from Japan. The expansion of trade and investment between the two countries will greatly contribute to the national interests of both Japan and the Philippines through increased employment, awareness of environmental conservation, and technology transfer. It will also contribute to the achievement of the SDGs set by the United Nations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Once again, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of you here who faithfully support peace and stability based on the rule of law, not by force.

I hope that you will have a comfortable and pleasant evening here.

Maraming salamat po at mabuhay!