

**Speech of RADM NATSUI Takashi, Commander of Escort Flotilla
Four at the 71st Anniversary of the Japan Self-Defense Forces**

Good evening.

I'm RADM Natsui, Japan Maritime Self Defense force, Commander of Escort Flotilla Four.

Thank you very much for coming to today's reception on board the JS "ISE". It is my great honor to co-host today's reception with his Excellency, Mr. ENDOU Kazuya, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan.

I also really appreciate your warm welcome and your great and kind support to our port visit here. I'm very pleased to visit Manila.

We the Escort Flotilla Four consist of two ships, JS ISE and JS Suzunami, and are currently engaging in Indo-Pacific Deployment. The purposes are to conduct a various type of exercises, improve our tactical skills, and strengthen our partnership in order to contribute to realizing a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific"

We departed our home port Sasebo last week. We invited naval and maritime Police officers to JS ISE and have been interacting with them through Ship Rider Cooperation Program. After departing Manila, we are going to participate in many exercises. Through these exercises, I believe we'll build an even stronger bilateral relationship as "reliable and inevitable partners" sharing the fundamental values and strategic interests.

As the security environment surrounding Indo-Pacific regions becomes increasingly challenging, the partnership between Japan and the Philippines has strengthened more than ever in recent years.

Japan and the Philippines conducted 2+2 meeting last year. We are maritime nations and strategic partners sharing fundamental values and principles. We'll promote security and defense cooperation to maintain and strengthen

a free and open international order based on the rule of law. We'll enhance our cooperation for regional and international challenges. Under such recognitions, we reached to sign the Reciprocal Access Agreement, and high officials pay mutual visits more often than before as Japan's Defense Minister visited the Philippines this February.

I heard that in the Philippines there is a saying "Matibay ang walis, palibhasa'y magkabigkis", which means a broom is sturdy because its strands are tightly bound. As this saying implies, if we get closer, we will be able to be more powerful in the region. Through the defense exchanges between the two countries, we will continue to enhance our relationships, and together we will contribute to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, and strive to maintain an international order based on the rule of law.

Finally, all these Japanese traditional dishes are prepared by our cooks. We hope that you will enjoy Japanese foods as well as the conversation. Again, thank you for joining today's reception.

Maraming Salamat.