

Assalamualaikum. Good afternoon.

It is a great honor to join you all as we formally hand over these wheel loaders under Japan's Grant Aid for the Economic and Social Development Program. With this ceremony, we take another step towards a safer, stronger BARMM.

As a close partner of the Philippines, Japan remains invested in the economic and infrastructure development in the BARMM for uplifting the living conditions of its citizens. This initiative is another testimony of our commitment to the peace and development of BARMM.

It was in the last quarter of 2022 when we started the discussion on this project with the officials of the Ministry of Public Works (MPW). Due to Typhoon Paeng that devastated Cotabato City and its surrounding areas back then, more than 40 lives were lost and approximately 580,000 people were forced to evacuate from the calamity caused by landslides and floods. As strategic foresight, this project was proposed by the officials of MPW to rescue those who will be affected and prepare for similar disasters to minimize damages.

Since the Philippines and Japan are both prone to natural disasters such as typhoons, floods, and earthquakes, we are bound by a common understanding of such risks.

When natural disasters strike, it recognizes no border or boundaries. Thus, it is crucial to prepare for disasters

adequately so that the potential destructive risks are reduced as much as possible.

In the face of recent climate change, disaster preparedness is becoming more urgent than ever to protect human lives and structures.

Through this grant, we will ensure better readiness in the region's disaster response. In offering these wheel loaders as well as other equipment such as dump trucks, excavators, and aquatic plant harvesters, coming later in batches, we hope MPW will be better equipped in facing the challenges in the region.

Beyond emergency response, the equipment can be a boon for BARMM's infrastructure construction. As stated in the Second Bangsamoro Development Plan, scaling-up of strategic, adequate, and climate-resilient infrastructure is one of the strategic objectives of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority. And MPW is the leading agency to implement this strategic objective. We do expect that this project will contribute to promoting the development of infrastructure to be constructed by MPW for the purpose of breathing life into the region's economy.

As roads connect more communities, trade can flow freely and give rise to more opportunities. With a more vibrant exchange of services, prosperity can accompany a lasting peace.

While these wheel loaders appear as simple equipment

today, I see them as vehicles for aspirations. What matters is not the machine itself, but the mission it serves. To that end, I have confidence that the MPW will harness them for meaningful impact.

In blending disaster risk management with economic development, we seek the best possibilities of establishing and maintaining peace and stability in BARMM. In ensuring the safe and peaceful lives of its citizens, we preserve the region's gains through resilient communities.

In this joint effort, I acknowledge and appreciate the dedication of the officials of MPW and our local government partners to the steadfast development in the region. With your continued care and maintenance, I hope the delivered equipment will work as long as possible for the people in BARMM.

In the spirit of preparedness, I am reminded of a quote: "The best time to repair a roof is when the sun is shining."

In MPW's promising utility, may these equipment long serve the peace and development of the Bangsamoro. May each task they carry out embody the shared goodwill between our two countries.

Thank you all very much.
Shukran jazilan.