

**Remarks of Ambassador ENDO Kazuya at the High-Level Conference
entitled “Strengthening Strategic Ties: 70 Years of Japan–Philippines
Normalization of Diplomatic Relations”**

24 March 2026

Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat at Ohayogozaimasu.

It is my great honor and privilege to speak at this symposium commemorating the 70th anniversary of Japan–Philippines friendship. I would first like to express my sincere appreciation to Professor Dindo Manhit, his team, as well as to all those who have worked hard to make this symposium possible.

In fact, in addition to the big celebration of 70th anniversary, this month of March humbly marks the two-year anniversary of my service in the Philippines. Time really flies. I always feel that it is my distinct honor to be able to serve in the Philippines when our cooperation is expanding and deepening steadily and rapidly, and when our partnership gets even more crucial under the increasingly complex and uncertain global landscape.

The current golden age of the Philippine-Japan relations is the product of all in our preceding generations who made long and tireless efforts to develop our relationship from dark times to reconciliation, from deepening ties to being elevated to a strategic partnership, and now to its new heights.

The theme of the 70th anniversary of Japan–Philippines friendship is “Weaving the Future Together: Peace, Prosperity, Possibilities.”

As reflected in the logo of intertwined Filipino Abaca rope and Japanese Shimenawa rope, this theme reflects our shared aspiration to continue weaving the bonds of friendship for the benefit of future generations.

I hope this symposium gives us another opportunity to renew our shared commitments to make every possible effort to further develop our partnership. Partnership that is based upon our mutual trust, friendship, and fully respects the rule of law and a free and open international order.

Today, I will briefly talk about how far we have come, where we are, and where we should be heading.

How far we have come

Looking back at our seven decades of friendship, we find a rich tapestry woven with countless beautiful threads. Each page of our history is full of human dramas.

On July 23, 1956, diplomatic relations between Japan and the Philippines were normalized following the entry into force of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Reparations Agreement between Japan and the Philippines.

1956 was the year when Japan joined the United Nations, and when the Philippines enacted the Rizal Act.

President Elpidio Quirino's 1953 decision to grant pardon for Japanese prisoners of war laid the foundation for the normalization of our ties. Despite the loss of his own wife and three children during World War II, he stated, "I am doing this because I do not want my children and my people to inherit from me hate for people who might yet be our friends for the permanent interest of the country".

Benevolence and a mutual long-term perspective have paved the way for genuine reconciliation and seven decades of friendship.

Right before the start of my service here, I visited a monument of President Quirino that has stood at Hibiya Park in Tokyo since 2016. In December 2024, I had the honor of attending the unveiling ceremony of the late President's memorial monument in Muntinlupa City.

Now, according to December 2025 OCTA research, almost eight in ten Filipinos trust Japan. Filipinos view Japan as a most reliable economic and security partner, with 74% trusting Japanese citizens. These strong ties have been built upon 70 years of high-level exchanges, development cooperations, and countless people-to-people exchanges. I believe our bilateral friendship

can serve as a role model for others because the sense of competition and resentment still sometimes prevails in other relations.

Where we are

This year also marks the 15th anniversary since the elevation to strategic partnership announced in 2011. Many even describe the current Philippine-Japan relations as being at the new height of strategic partnership. What are the connotations of strategic partnership, then?

First, our partnership is mutually beneficial. It is the balanced interests and benefits of both countries that sustain our partnership.

Second, our partnership is defined by longstanding perspectives. It is not simple accumulation of short-sighted business transactions.

Third, it is the partnership to address our shared goals and challenges. Our shared goals are peace, stability, and prosperity of our two countries, as well as our region and the world. Our shared challenges include those against maritime order, disturbance in the supply chain, energy security, and so forth.

From reconciliation to strategic partnership and to its new heights, the Philippines and Japan have tirelessly worked together in the last 70 years.

So, where are we now? It is heartening that our cooperation is deepening and expanding steadily across all fields. Why are our cooperations growing? Because we recognize each other as strategic partners. As maritime nations located along significant sea lanes in a close neighborhood, both allied with the United States, and facing similar challenges against maritime order, our security cooperation is a natural necessity. As economies with various complementarities, situated in the vicinity, richly empowered by respective diligent people, our close economic ties are inevitable. Based on our robust friendship and trust, supported by our respective unique cultures and natural beauties, growth in people-to-people ties is our common destiny.

Our two countries are steadily and rapidly deepening security cooperation. Shortly after I started my service in the Philippines, we formally signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), which was subsequently approved by the Philippine Senate and Japan's National Diet.

Two decades ago, the approval process of Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement, or JPEPA, by the Philippine Senate was still quite challenging for my predecessors then. But for the RAA, the Senate vote was unanimous. The trust level between us has also developed significantly even in the last twenty years.

The Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) was also officially signed during Foreign Minister MOTEGI's visit to Manila last January. I am

delighted that the agreements to enhance the interoperability of our two forces are to be deliberated in the Japanese Diet for two consecutive years.

The Philippines is also the main recipient and partner of our Official Security Assistance, or OSA, as the only country that received OSA for three years in a row.

Trilateral cooperation among the Philippines-Japan-the U.S. and the quadrilateral cooperation among the Philippines-Japan-the U.S.-Australia are both growing. I anticipate strengthened participation of the Japan Self-Defense Forces in the upcoming joint exercises held in the Philippines, particularly in the Balikatan.

For many years, Japan has supported the Philippines as its largest bilateral development partner. Our cooperation has covered a wide range of areas — from major infrastructure projects such as urban railways, roads and bridges, to disaster risk reduction, maritime cooperation, technical assistance, support for the Mindanao peace process, and grassroots-level development initiatives.

Japanese companies have also been actively contributing to this partnership through their investments to the Philippines. Today, approximately 1,600 Japanese companies operate in the country, making Japan one of the

Philippines' most important trade and investment partners. I also find a number of Filipino friends making investments in Japan in recent years.

Many Filipinos—including seafarers, healthcare workers —are making valuable contributions to Japanese society. These human connections form an essential foundation for the prosperity of both our countries. Remittance from Japan ranks the fourth after the U.S., Singapore and Saudi Arabia.

I would like to share a story related to Filipino workers. Fifteen years ago, after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, most of the caregiver candidates under the JPEPA remained in the disaster-stricken Tohoku region in Japan, dedicating themselves to care for the elderly and firmly insisting that they could not abandon them. The Japanese people will never forget that, in addition to the support through the provision of emergency relief goods and the dispatch of a medical assistance team.

The spirit of cooperation extends to the multilateral stage. Japan and the Philippines work closely through ASEAN centered regional frameworks, including the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Our two countries have promoted principles such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and respect for international law in order to support peace and stability in the region.

With the Philippines serving as ASEAN Chair this year, Japan strongly supports its leadership in strengthening ASEAN centrality and unity, and advancing regional cooperation. The Philippine's active role in international affairs is also visible during the recent Presidential visit to the United Nations, where President Marcos stressed the importance of the rule of law, multilateralism, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Japan highly values the Philippines' contributions to international peace and stability and looks forward to working closely together on the global stage.

The current Japanese administration led by Prime Minister Takaichi has articulated the vision of "Responsible Japanese Diplomacy for Peace and Prosperity." As was shown in her recent trip to the U.S., this reflects Japan's determination to contribute proactively to peace and prosperity in the international community.

Japan will continue working with partners such as the Philippines to realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

Our two countries have walked together as partners committed to safeguarding peace and building prosperity. This fundamental direction will remain unchanged in the years ahead.

Where we should be heading for

On another aspect, new possibilities are emerging in Japan–Philippines relations.

One of the Philippines’ greatest strengths lies in its young population. With a young and dynamic society, the Philippines possesses tremendous potential to shape the future.

Through the JET Program, which began accepting Filipino participants in 2014, more than 570 Filipinos have already been dispatched to Japan. In recent years, the program has grown increasingly popular, attracting more than 3,000 applications annually.

Interest in Japanese language education has also seen remarkable growth. Since the introduction of Japanese under the Special Program in Foreign Language (SPFL) in 2009, the number of public high schools offering Japanese language education has increased from 11 to 80. I should study Tagalog harder this year, despite my schedule getting busier.

This deepening connection clearly extends to travel where we have witnessed a significant increase in the number of Filipino tourists visiting Japan, perhaps including all of you here. From 2006 to 2012, Filipino visitors to Japan remained less than 100,000. In 2025, the number rose to almost 900,000 even though we had years of pandemic.

These people-to-people connections represent the greatest potential for the future of Japan–Philippines relations.

Looking ahead, we see promising horizons for cooperation in fields such as space, green transformation (GX), digital transformation (DX), and artificial intelligence (AI). Meanwhile, economic security and resilience will remain important areas for cooperation. Our defense cooperation will also continue to grow. This month, I welcomed an additional military attaché to my Embassy, now having three representatives of all three services of the air, naval and ground Self Defense Forces.

By working together to safeguard peace and promote prosperity, we are expanding the possibilities for the future. Japan and the Philippines are genuine partners in this endeavor.

We will continue “weaving the future together.” I sincerely hope that today’s symposium will serve as a meaningful opportunity for all of us to reflect on our shared future.

Maraming salamat po at mabuhay ang pagkakaibigan ng Pilipinas at Japan!