

Speech for Chief Representative SAKAMOTO Takema

Philippines-Japan Friendship Week 2024

July 30, 2024

- Dear my *Kasama* and *Kaibigan*, especially from DMW
- All participants and guests,
- In particular, Philippine Heroines and heroes, the Overseas Filipino Workers

Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat!

It is my great honor and privilege to be part of this year's celebration of the Philippines-Japan Friendship Week.

Thank you, my dear Secretary Cacdac, for your kind invitation.

During my stay in this lovely country for more than two years, I have witnessed firsthand how strong bilateral friendships across borders are now.

As you may know, JICA is the exclusive Japanese governmental agency responsible for Japan's Official Development Assistance, ODA.

JICA has been working for the development and prosperity of the Philippines for more than a half century, and JICA is currently conducting over 100 on-going landmark projects in the country, such as MRT line3 rehabilitation, 1st ever underground Subway construction in Metro Manila, capacity development programs including scholarships to Japan, to name a few.

Through its very various cooperation, JICA is enthusiastically committed to strengthening our two nations' relationship further.

Here, I would like to echo the words of Japan's Prime Minister Kishida when he came to the Philippines last November as follows,

- ① From a "Golden Age" to New Heights
- ② Golden Friendship, Golden Opportunity

Yes, it is our responsibility to take the “Heart-to-Heart Ties” established by our predecessors to new heights and pass them on to the next generation.

Needless to say, the success of OFWs in Japan has a significant impact, in this context.

I cannot emphasize more that OFWs play great roles in the growth of the Philippine economy, contributing to 9% of the total GDP as a whole.

My dear more than 300,000 Filipinos in Japan!
you are also great “Grassroot Ambassadors”, strengthening ties between our two nations.

You serve as a catalyst for ① exchanging culture, ② deepening mutual understanding, and ③ advancing both countries’ development.

Consequently, JICA acknowledges and would like to support the aspirations of OFWs for personal and professional growth.

So, JICA is discussing with DMW to explore whether, or what and how, JICA can support OFWs for providing access to further ①education, ②skills training, and ③opportunities, so that you can reach your full potential, and make greater contributions to both Filipino and Japanese societies.

Furthermore, while the future labor force of the Philippines has strong potential to boost economic growth, given that the Philippines is enjoying the world's longest demographic dividend, it is crucial to re-emphasize the importance of the education, skills training and job opportunities.

Accordingly, the current administration has prioritized jobs, and I reiterate that JICA is truly willing to support this policy.

Once again, I stress the critical importance for Filipinos to find or create sufficient job opportunities to fully harness the benefit from the demographic dividend.

On the other hand, Japan is currently facing the challenge of labor shortage due to its aging society.

Therefore, more OFWs in Japan would be mutually beneficial. It is a win-win solution!

In this sense, too, JICA continues to explore ways to cooperate with the Philippine government, especially with DMW, in the field of capacity development of human resources of the country, and in championing the rights and welfare of OFWs.

If I may introduce JICA's efforts a little bit more, JICA helps foreign workers address various challenges, both before coming to Japan, during their staying in Japan, as well as after returning to their home countries.

This support extends globally.

One of the salient initiatives of JICA is “*the Japan Platform for Migrant Workers towards Responsible and Inclusive Society*”, known as “*JP-MIRAI*”, launched in 2020, together with public and private stakeholders in Japan.

This platform serves as a hub for information sharing and assistance to migrant workers in Japan.

You are encouraged to visit the JP-MIRAI Portal site.

In that portal site, you could find essential information, even in English and Tagalog languages, to work and live in Japan safely and comfortably.

For every OFW in Japan, including future OFW in Japan, I hope that the JP-MIRAI portal can assist you in your questions and needs for your daily life in Japan.

Additionally, JICA's ex-volunteers, who have worked in the Philippines and can speak Filipino language, may also provide valuable assistance to OFWs in Japan.

In closing, taking this precious opportunity, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our Filipino friends for the love and support you have given to Japan.

Rest assured, JICA continues to be a trusted partner of the Philippines.

Kasama nyo kami!

Mag Bayanihan tayo!

Para sa Bagong Pilipinas!

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

Maraming salamat po sa inyong lahat.

Mabuhay, and good morning to all of you!