

Speech by Kentaro Sonoura, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister
Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision Now
– moving from vision sharing to implementation

1. Mr Allan Gyngell, Mr John McCarthy, Dr Bryce Wakefield Speakers of today's symposium, and distinguished guests.
2. Thank you for the kind introduction. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to come back to Australia. In March last year I spoke at the University of Sydney. Today I will speak about how the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific has spread around the world and where it now stands.
3. As Special Advisor to Prime Minister Abe on national security, since 2017 I have travelled to around seventy countries to promote the vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. The term "Indo-Pacific" has been widely shared, referred to and discussed in various fora. It was first announced by Prime Minister Abe in his speech at the 6th Tokyo International Conference on African Development in 2016.
4. Since we are in the Pacific, let me begin with Japan's deepening engagement with the Pacific Island region, which lies at the center of the Pacific Ocean. It is not generally known that Japan has enjoyed historical ties with the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and the Marshall Islands through the immigration of Japanese people to those countries following WWI. You may also be surprised to learn that even today, over 20% of the population of Micronesia and Palau are of Japanese origin. The name of the sixth President of Palau was Kunio Nakamura, a genuinely Japanese name. Pacific Island countries have long permitted us to make use of their maritime resources, particularly tuna and bonito. Thus it is natural for Japan to have a diplomatic goal of engaging with Pacific Island countries in order to expand our friendly and mutually beneficial bilateral relationships with them.

5. As part of our long term commitment, we have hosted the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting, also known as PALM, since 1997 and provided development assistance to the region. More recently, Japan hosted PALM 8 in May last year. The participants discussed free, open and sustainable oceans as the key agenda for the meeting. They also shared their recognition of the importance of the rule of law on the seas, and agreed to promote cooperation in such areas as capacity building in maritime security, maritime law enforcement, along with the development of ports and harbors.

6. Since February this year, I have convened three meetings of an inter-ministerial committee within my government to promote cooperation with Pacific Island countries. We adopted a concrete policy to support efforts aimed at a free and open Indo-Pacific through a whole-of-government approach. Japan has thus renewed its determination to commit to the region. I believe this commitment will also be reflected in the details of next year's fiscal budget for the Japanese government. I myself have already traveled four times to Pacific Island countries, and will be visiting Palau after my visit to Australia. Furthermore, in order to express Japan's new level of firm commitment, earlier this month Foreign Minister Kono made the first official bilateral visit to Fiji by a Japanese foreign minister in 32 years, and made the first ever official bilateral visit to the three Micronesian countries mentioned above by a Japanese foreign minister.

7. Turning to other parts of the world, many countries have made reference to their own visions for the Indo-Pacific. As you all know, Prime Minister Morrison referred to a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific in his diplomatic policy speech in June. The US changed the name of the "United States Pacific Command" to the "United States Indo-Pacific Command" in May 2018, and released its Indo-Pacific Strategy Report in June this year. India has expressed its commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific through its "Act East" policy, and Prime Minister Modi articulated his

vision for the Indo-Pacific region at the Shangri-La Dialogue last year. France too announced its “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific” in June 2018. Last but not least, ASEAN recently adopted its landmark “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.” At this point, I think we can conclude that we have moved from the dissemination phase to the implementation phase of our policies, all of which reflect and expand on the scope of each country’s vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

8. The increasing number of countries expressing visions for a free and open Indo-Pacific is a reflection of the fact that we actually need to make the Indo-Pacific free, open and prosperous.
9. In order to promote our vision, we must do three things. The first is to advocate the importance of basic values such as the rule of law. The second is to pursue economic prosperity. The third is to make a commitment to peace and stability, which includes building maritime law enforcement capacity. These tasks will be made more effective if we act together. Given the degree of shared views among regional players, we regularly engage in policy dialogue with our partners in the region on how best to realize a free and open Indo Pacific. The trilateral strategic dialogue between Australia, Japan and the US remains a valuable platform for this task, the latest of which took place in Bangkok earlier this month. The three countries also announced the formation of a trilateral partnership for regional infrastructure investment in November last year.
10. With the U.K., we agreed to work together on the promotion of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. In addition, at a time when the U.K. is at a historic turning point of its foreign policy in the wake of Brexit, Japan will encourage the U.K. to continue its engagement with this region, especially in relation to maritime security, quality infrastructure, and cybersecurity. Japan also agreed with France at the leaders’ meeting held in June to collaborate on maritime security, along with climate change, the environment, bio-diversity, and high-quality infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region.

11. Furthermore, we work with countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia to strengthen their maritime law enforcement capacities by providing them with patrol vessels and technical assistance. These countries are adjacent to key international sea lanes in the Indo-Pacific, including the Strait of Malacca, and their law enforcement capacities play a pivotal role in ensuring freedom of navigation. Together with Sri Lanka, Japan and India recently signed a memorandum of cooperation to jointly develop Colombo Port, a strategically important piece of infrastructure. Furthermore, under the trilateral cooperation framework shared by Japan, Timor-Leste and Indonesia, an agreement was reached to promote cooperation in the maritime sphere, whereby Japan and Indonesia shared their respective expertise in formulating comprehensive maritime policies and their content with Timor-Leste. With regard to the Maldives, Japan has provided them with oil pollution treatment equipment and fire boats. We have also conducted joint goodwill exercises between the Maldivian Coast Guard and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

12. One very important point that I would like to make with regard to the world is that the vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific is inclusive – it does not exclude any country, nor does it establish a new organization or override or diminish an existing one. Our goal is to make a free and open Indo-Pacific an international public asset which brings peace and prosperity to all without discrimination. Japan is ready to cooperate with any country, and welcomes various proposals and opportunities for development assistance as long as they meet international standards. Each country retains its sovereign authority under the FOIP and joins it willingly. In the FOIP, each country implements its own initiative under its own sovereignty and promotes it as an independent and voluntary initiative. When many countries work together in this way, each initiative will contribute to an overall collective efforts and allow for further development. This will then profit each country involved and the wider

international community.

13. In my view, we have been very successful in gaining wide support and positive responses from countries around the globe to our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. Under Japan's leadership, the G20, including China, endorsed the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment at the Osaka Summit. It's important to promote countries' compliance with international standards by including the G20 Principles in order to ensure quality growth in recipient countries and fair competition.

14. Japan is always conscious of the fact that a free and open Indo-Pacific should contribute to sustainable prosperity for the region. We will boost connectivity in the region through quality infrastructure, such as the Palau International Airport and the Honiara International Airport in the Solomon Islands. In addition, Japan was happy to join the Papua New Guinea Electrification Partnership together with Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. in order to help Papua New Guinea create a national electricity grid. We will also provide technical cooperation aimed at greater fiscal sustainability to some Pacific Island countries. Addressing fiscal vulnerability is an important prerequisite for sustainable economic prosperity, but is also important for ensuring sovereignty.

15. I am aware that you will be discussing the environment and climate change later today. We must not ignore climate change and natural disasters, because they pose imminent security threats to the region. In an effort to cope with this, Japan is constructing the Pacific Climate Change Center in Samoa. It will soon be completed, and will serve as a hub for human resource development aimed at tackling the challenges posed by climate change throughout the region. We have also provided thousands of solar power systems and seawater desalination units to all fourteen Pacific Island

countries through the Pacific Environment Community Fund.

16. I will conclude by drawing your attention to what Japan and Australia can do to realise a free and open Indo-Pacific. Japan and Australia are both important players in this region and share the will and capacity to uphold stability and prosperity in the region. I would therefore like to encourage Australia to do more with ASEAN by reinforcing its unity. On the bilateral front, it is significant that Japan and Australia will conduct our first ever air-to-air exercise in Japan this year known as “Bushido Guardian 19,” which will deepen our bilateral security and defense cooperation. It is also important that we further strengthen the framework of the Japan, U.S., Australia and India dialogue, given we share common values in the Indo-Pacific. Given our Special Strategic Partnership, I will do my best to ensure Japan and Australia, along with other like-minded countries, work together for the peace and prosperity of the Pacific Islands region, keenly aware that it is vital to the peace and prosperity of the wider Indo-Pacific to which we belong.