

Lifting spirits through sports and entertainment.

Today, on the occasion of the 49th anniversary of Samoa regaining her full Independence, I have the singular honour, on behalf of Samoa's Head of State, His Highness TuiAtua Tupua Tamasese Efi, the government and the people of Samoa, to extend to Their Imperial Majesties, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and to the government and the people of Japan my sincere respect and best wishes at this very difficult time following the catastrophic devastation caused by the massive earthquake and tsunami which struck north eastern Japan on 11 March 2011. I offer also my deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones, and my heartfelt sympathies for those who suffered serious injuries and those who have lost their homes and their livelihoods. The thoughts and prayers of the leaders and the people of Samoa are with you all as you undertake the monumental and heartbreaking task of rebuilding your lives, your communities, and your country. The people of Japan are no strangers to dealing effectively with natural and man-made disasters on an epic scale. This time too, people throughout the world have watched in great admiration the calm, disciplined and efficient way that the people of Japan have been dealing with the brutal impact of this disaster. There is no doubt that the indomitable spirit and the renowned resilience of the Japanese people, together with strong support from the international community, will see Japan emerge stronger from this catastrophe.

From recent experiences, the people of Samoa are intimately familiar with the devastating impact of a major earthquake and tsunami. In September 2009, Samoa was struck by a magnitude 8.3 earthquake which generated a powerful tsunami that reached heights of over 14 meters on land. Whole villages were completely wiped out and 143 people perished, a significant loss of life in a population of a little under two hundred thousand people. With over 20% of her GDP needed to pay for the rehabilitation and recovery costs, Samoa's economy contracted into negative growth territory. However with the assistance from the international community, especially Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China, excellent recovery has been made and the country is back on solid ground.

Apart from monetary donations and messages of condolence and best wishes to the leaders and the people of Japan, Samoa has been looking at ways to help lift the spirits and the morale of the people of Japan at this very difficult time. Accordingly, Samoa's national rugby team (Manu Samoa) has decided to play its game against Japan (Brave Blossoms) in Tokyo on 2nd July 2011, in the Pacific Nations rugby tournament involving also Fiji and Tonga, although this tournament which was scheduled to be held in Japan in July, has been shifted to Fiji following the March 11 disaster.

In the same spirit, Samoa's Embassy in Tokyo has decided not to host the usual diplomatic reception to mark Samoa's Independence Day. Instead, in conjunction with the Samoans who have made Japan their home, as well as some Samoa students studying in Japan, and some Samoans playing professional rugby in Japan, a Samoan entertainment group will travel to the evacuation centre at Kisai High School in Saitama, housing evacuees from Futaba town, located near the Fukushima nuclear power plant, and present exciting Samoa dances and songs on Sunday 5 June 2011.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Japan Times for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts with its distinguished readers.

Leiataua Dr. Kilifoti Eteuati

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Embassy of the Independent State of Samoa