

The establishment of the Embassy of the Independent State of Samoa to Japan, in Tokyo, 2009.

In early 2008, the Samoa Cabinet made the decision to establish the Embassy of the Independent State of Samoa to Japan, in Tokyo. Funds for the implementation of this decision were provided in the 2008/09 budget (July 2008-June 2009), and the relevant government Ministries were instructed to implement this decision during this financial year. The Samoa government was determined to proceed with the early implementation of its decision even as the global financial crisis started to impact seriously on Samoa's economy later in 2008. A timetable to meet the Cabinet's instructions was set and it was successfully followed leading to the arrival in Tokyo of Samoa's first Ambassador to Japan during the first week of July 2009.

The decision by the Samoa government to establish Samoa's Embassy in Tokyo was not a difficult one to make given the excellent relations which have developed between Samoa and Japan since diplomatic relations were established between the two countries in 1973. During the past thirty seven years, Japan has become one of Samoa's major development partners, and the two countries have consistently supported each other in their bilateral, regional and international dealings, most notably in the latter category, in the United Nations and its many agencies.

Japan has provided Samoa with substantial assistance which has impacted directly on virtually all spheres of Samoan existence; it has been aid well-targeted and and effectively applied, and it has clearly improved the lives of the people of Samoa particularly in the rural areas. As a result, Samoans throughout the country deeply value and appreciate Japan's assistance. A few examples: in the field of health, Japan funded the design and the construction of all the hospitals on the big island of Savaii. It did the same for the most populous island of Upolu except for the main hospital in the capital of Apia. In the other major social area of education, Japan funded the design and the construction of all the facilities (buildings, grounds, roads etc) on the main campus of the National University of Samoa, and it has contributed the majority part of the funding for the construction of most of the school buildings throughout Samoa. It has also provided a large number of scholarship grants for Samoan students to study in Japanese tertiary institutions as well as provided training for Samoans in both Japan and Samoa. And Japan has sent many highly skilled Japanese volunteers and specialists to provide support to government Ministries and agencies, as well as the private sector.

On maritime matters, Japan is by far Samoa's principal development partner. All the wharves at the Matautu port which handles all of Samoa's international and inter-island shipping in Apia were designed and built under Japanese grant aid, and the main inter-island vessels which provide public transportation between the islands of Upolu and Savaii, and between Samoa and American Samoa, have all been provided by Japan. The latest addition to this fleet, the newly completed Lady Samoa III, was handed to the Samoan government by the Japanese shipbuilding company at Chiba Prefecture in the last week of January 2010, and it is expected to reach Samoa on her maiden voyage this weekend (19-20 February 2010). The Lady Samoa III is a magnificent vessel which has the capacity to carry 740 passengers (+12 crew members) and 40 vehicles. It will be used mainly on Samoa's busiest sea route between Upolu and Savaii islands, replacing the Lady Samoa II, another Japanese funded vessel, which has plied this same route for over 20 years. As a result of this generous assistance by Japan, the people of Samoa from all walks of life, and of all ages, will enjoy an even more comfortable and safe sea voyage between the two main islands of Samoa for many years to come.

Like all projects of this kind anywhere in the world, establishing the new Samoa Embassy in Japan has been enjoyable and frustrating at times. We got off to a terrific start when the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed me on my arrival in Tokyo on 7 July 2009 that I was to present my credentials as Samoa's Ambassador to Japan to His Imperial Highness, Crown Prince Naruhito on 14 July 2009, His Majesty Emperor Akihito being away on an Imperial visit to Canada at the time. The seven days between arrival and credentials presentation was an unusually short period for Japan (2-3 months was the normal wait period) but, it was a most fortunate arrangement which allowed me to embark immediately on establishing the Embassy as a fully-accredited Ambassador to Japan.

Quickly however, we encountered the Japanese Way of doing things which unfortunately, often meant a lengthy wait for foreigners, including diplomats, for such simple items as mobile telephones, driver's licenses, credit cards and so on. On the other hand, to balance matters out, my wife and I greatly enjoyed Japanese cultural practices, Japanese cuisine and the efficiency, and safe and clean environment of the Tokyo public transport system, in particular the trains and the metro. And we thoroughly enjoyed the quality of the goods and services when they were finally delivered.

We have also been most fortunate in having the extraordinarily effective hands-on assistance and support of the highly skilled and very patient Mr. Matsuda of the Pacific International company. We would like to thank Matsuda san, Mrs. Oishi and the other staff members of Pacific International. Their assistance was made possible by the President of the

company, Mr. Oishi who is Samoa's official trade and tourism representative in Japan. My special thank you to Oishi san.

Staff members of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly those of the Oceania and the Protocol Divisions have been most helpful to us as we went about establishing the new Embassy in Tokyo. They continue to assist and support Samoa's Embassy. We are most grateful them. Many other institutions and individuals in Japan have helped in the establishment of Samoa's new Embassy, and we thank them all sincerely for their invaluable assistance and support.

The Ambassador's residence and the Counsellor's accommodation were secured, furnished and occupied by August/September last year. The chancery, at Chuo-ku, became operational in early August 2009, and it was officially opened on 29 January 2010 by the Samoa Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure, with the Hon. Chinami Nishimura, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, delivering a speech on behalf of the government of Japan.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite the members of the JICA SAMOA OB Association to visit the chancery of Samoa's Embassy in Tokyo and share stories and a drink of tea with us when you have time.

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