Statement of Ambassador Sobashima Hidenobu at the Emperor’s Birthday Reception on March 4, 2021

Traditional Leaders,

The Hon. Kandhi Elieisar, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Federated States of Micronesia,

The Hon. Emanuel Mori, the Seventh President of the FSM,

Senior Government Officials Present,

Your Excellency Huang Zheng, Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China,

Other Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Leaders and Members of Churches and Faith Organizations,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor and pleasure to welcome all of you present here this evening to a reception to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

(Condolences)

At the outset, I would like to express my deepest condolences to the Government of the FSM in the wake of the recent untimely passing of the Hon. Marion Henry, Secretary of Resources and Development and the Hon. Livingston Taulung, Secretary of Health and Social Affairs and Chairman of the National COVID-19 Taskforce, among other heroes and heroines of the FSM.

May their souls rest in eternal peace!

(New Normal Reception)

Today we intend to host this reception in a new normal manner.

Except for only several countries which are still COVID-19 free, including the FSM, thanks to the leadership of H.E. the President and the efforts of all those concerned, the entire world including Japan is suffering from the COVID-19 infection.

Thus, as a preparation for the possible eventuality which should be preferably avoided, we have planned to host this reception with the reduced number of invitees, preparing masks available for the participants, distancing seats 6 feet from each other, placing a sanitizer at each table, and serving food in individual small plates, among other arrangements.

I hope you will have no problem with these, or even enjoy this new way.

(The Emperor’s Birthday)

His Majesty the Emperor became 61 years old, last week, on the 23rd of February 2021.

Because of the pandemic, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress refrained from the traditional events and visits, while conducting a number of them virtually, in the past year.

At the press conference on the birthday, His Majesty the Emperor sympathized with the people having a difficult time, admired the devotion of the medical personnel, and expressed the concern for the places in the world where even the clean water for washing hands is not available, among other remarks.

The Hon. Motegi Toshimitsu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, who, in usual years, hosts a reception to celebrate His Majesty’s birthday inviting diplomats, among other guests, did not do so this year, but issued a congratulatory message accompanied by that of the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Japan.

(Japan and the FSM)

With respect to the bilateral relationship between Japan and the Federated States of Micronesia, while the two countries established their diplomatic relations in 1988, their people’s exchanges date back about 130 years ago, and there are a great number of citizens of the FSM of Japanese relationship.

In the recent years, while extensive activities of fishing by Japanese vessels have been seen in the waters of the FSM, the Government of Japan has been engaged in various development cooperation projects in the FSM including technical cooperation through people-to-people exchanges by JICA.

Exchanges organized by private and academic institutions have been also abundant between the two countries.

The Government of Japan attaches importance to promoting the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”.

The unshakably friendly relationship which has been consolidated between Japan and the FSM, a country almost at the center of the Pacific, which is linked to Japan by the sea, provides a strong basis for the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”.

(COVID-19)

In the last year, the world has been severely affected by COVID-19.

Japan and the International Olympic Committee decided to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games one year to the summer in 2021.

The FSM closed its borders after COVID-19 cases were confirmed in Hawaii and Guam in March 2020, and has been taking measures for the protection of the nation from the pandemic.

In February 2020, the FSM Government requested its partners the cooperation for the FSM’s immediate needs.

While the Government of Japan was considering what it could do to respond to the request, the Pohnpei Japan Club invited the donations from among the Japanese residents here and handed the collected donations to the Hon. Yosiwo George, Vice President of the FSM accompanied by the Hon. Health Secretary Taulung and me in March 2020.

Although the collected amount was not large, I am proud of such an initiative taken by the Japanese community here and of those people who made donations at that time.

Then the Government of Japan decided to offer to the FSM through UNICEF the personal protective equipment amounting to about 160,000 US Dollars in April, followed by the Grant Assistance for procuring medical equipment made in Japan in June amounting to up to 382 million Yen or around 3.5 million US Dollars.

Last month, the Government of Japan decided to offer the additional assistance through UNICEF and WHO to the FSM amounting to about 1.5 million US Dollars for the purpose of developing immunization facilities in the FSM by providing cold chain equipment and means of transportation, among others.

While the Government of Japan has committed its contribution of 200 million US Dollars to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment, among other multilateral cooperation, it will continue to consider additional bilateral contributions including for the FSM.

I have been attending the National COVID-19 Taskforce meetings.

There I introduced such cooperation from Japan as I have just mentioned, as well as the COVID-19 situation in Japan and how Japan was handling the situation so that the FSM might take advantage of such information.

This reception is one example of partial demonstration of what we are doing in Japan.

(Japan’s Cooperation in Other Areas)

As for our cooperation in other areas, while we need to wait for the return and arrival of the JICA personnel to resume full-scale cooperation, we have a number of ongoing cooperation such as the Enhancing Disaster and Climate Change Resilience Project administered by UNDP amounting to 7.4 million US Dollars, the successive Economic and Social Development Programmes, and the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects, progressing, while for some projects with some delays, almost as usual, showing the strong Kizuna between Japan and the FSM.

In the past 12 months, we made the new commitments for the Woodchipper Project, Pohnpei Recycling Center, and Palikir Elementary School, in Pohnpei State, and St. Mary’s Elementary School, in Yap State. We extended the contract with JMAS for its marine environment protection project in Chuuk State.

We handed over the fences and drainage facilities to Rumuu Elementary School in Yap State, the equipment of the FY 2016 Economic and Social Development Programme to Pohnpei State, and a Garbage Truck to the State’s Madolenihmw Municipality.

(Other Partners’ Cooperation)

I greatly admire the United States of America, for its generous donation of the COVID-19 vaccine to the FSM, among its other cooperation, among other donors’ cooperation.

Thanks to the vaccine donation from the United States, the FSM is advanced in the Pacific region, just like the other COMPACT countries of Palau and Marshal Islands, in terms of the vaccination.

(Wish for a Better Year)

I sincerely hope that the vaccination will progress smoothly and quickly and the good preparations will be made in the FSM, and its borders will be opened again soon.

I wish we will have a much better year in 2021, beating COVID-19.

With this hope, I look forward to cooperating with all of you present here this evening, to further advance the friendly and cooperative relationship between Japan and the FSM.

(Toast)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having said this, now I would like to propose a toast to H.E. David W. Panuelo, President of the Federated States of Micronesia, wishing for His Excellency’s continued good health and leadership, to the good health and happiness of the Guest of Honor Secretary Elieisar and all of you present here, as well as to the continuously friendly and cooperative relationship between Japan and the FSM.

Paiamwahu!

Kalahngan. Thank you.