

# **Speech by Ambassador of Japan HE Mr Toshihisa Takata for the 75th Anniversary of the Featherston Incident**

Honourable Ron Mark, Minister of Defense  
Honourable Tracey Martin, Minister of Internal Affairs,  
Your Worship Viv Napier, Mayor of the South Wairarapa District, and  
organiser of this commemoration,  
Your Worships John Booth and Lyn Patterson, Mayors of Carterton and  
Masterton, respectively,  
Mr Graham Apthorpe, representative of Cowra, Australia,

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to attend the commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Featherston Incident today. I would like to extend my deep gratitude to all whose efforts have continued this remembrance throughout this time. 75 years is a significant milestone, and I am moved to see the care and thought put into today's programme, and the people present at this commemoration. I am sure that our ancestors could not have guessed how far we would come in our struggle for peace, but I am also sure, that be they Japanese or New Zealander, they would be very proud to see us here today, remembering them together, as a united group.

I have visited this memorial garden multiple times since my arrival to New Zealand as Ambassador of Japan to New Zealand. Established in 1976 in memory of the Featherston Incident, which took place in 1943, it symbolises the reconciliation, mutual understanding and positive relationship between Japan and New Zealand. The bonds between our two countries are strong and friendly. We have a relationship that, in the throes of wartime when the Featherston Incident occurred, might have seemed impossible at the time.

48 Japanese prisoners of war, and one New Zealand guard lost their lives, and many others were injured, on this day 75 years ago, during a time in which Japan and the Allied Forces, including New Zealand, were at war with one another. It is a great accomplishment that we now commemorate this day and pay tribute together as friends, to all those who lost their lives, regardless of nationality. I hope that in continuing to pay tribute to those who lost their lives we are reminded about the disastrous outcomes of war, and inspired always to work towards keeping peace. I hope that we may strive toward further strengthening our countries' long-standing relationship, while sparing our thoughts on days like this one, to the people who were sacrificed in days less peaceful. The friendly relations between Japan and New Zealand are to be proud of: based on respect for one another, mutual understanding, and shared fundamental democratic and societal values.

These relations would not be possible without the hard work and friendly attitudes that the people of the South Wairarapa have shown to people from Japan since the end of the war. Past mayors of the South Wairarapa have all made strong efforts which have contributed to the peace between our people, and continue to do so. Mrs Adrienne Staples is notable in the South Wairarapa's history of mayors, receiving the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette in 2017 for her contributions to the relationship between Japan and Featherston in particular. Mayor Viv Napier is following in the footsteps of these many mayors before her, showing much respect and goodwill towards Japan and Japanese people. I am sincerely grateful for this.

I would like to thank the people of Featherston and the South Wairarapa, the people the Mayors represent, from the bottom of my heart, for their consideration for and cooperation with Japanese residents and visitors alike. Relationships between countries reflect the relationships of their people, and I can confidently say that the people-to-people relationships between New Zealanders and Japanese are very positive, Featherston being a particularly good role model of this. Chor Farmer, a male chorus group from Japan comes to New Zealand every two years, and upon their Goodwill tour to Featherston, they were given extremely positive reviews by the people who attended their concert and provided with caring host families, organised by the District Council of South Wairarapa. It truly could not be possible for such bonds to be created between the people of Japan and New Zealand without the kind and welcoming attitudes you have shown towards us. I also wish to express my gratitude to the management and staff of Juken New Zealand and its parent Company Wood One Japan, for their valuable role and contribution in this process of reconciliation and friendship building.

As I conclude my remarks on this important occasion, I would like us all to reaffirm our commitment and determination to advance and deepen further the bonds of friendship and cooperation between our two countries. I hope for Japan and New Zealand to continue to have peaceful, productive and positive relations in the future. Thank you.

