

SPEECH FOR THE EMPEROR'S 85th BIRTHDAY RECEPTION

Tuesday, 11 December 2018, Chateau on the Park Hotel, Christchurch

Honourable Lianne Dalziel, Mayor of Christchurch and the Guest of Honour tonight,

H.E. Mr Phillip Gibson, Former Ambassador of New Zealand in Japan and Special Advisor and Director of MFAT,

Dear Colleagues of the Christchurch Consular Corps,

Honourable City Counselors,

Distinguished Guests, and Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a nice feeling to be in front of friendly people.

(Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa)

I am honoured to welcome you all to this reception to celebrate the 85th birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan and I am grateful for your presence tonight. Let us all wish the continued good health of His Majesty.

His Majesty Emperor Akihito will abdicate on the 30th of April next year, after marking the thirtieth anniversary of His Majesty's accession to the Throne in January. His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Naruhito will be enthroned on the 1st of May. Therefore, this year marks the final occasion to celebrate the current Emperor's birthday.

I assumed this post as Ambassador of Japan to New Zealand in October

this year. Since my arrival, my wife and I have had a fruitful time here thanks to your cordial cooperation and assistance in various areas.

(Japan-NZ relationship overview)

Japan and New Zealand share fundamental democratic and societal values.

In particular, the policy links between New Zealand's Pacific Reset and Japan's Free and Open Indo Pacific vision will foster and deepen our bilateral engagements.

The year 2018 has witnessed robust senior-level exchanges between our two countries. Foreign Minister Peters visited Japan in May to attend the 8th Pacific Islands Meeting in Japan, which was followed by another high level visit in July and then, in October, Foreign Minister Kono of Japan came to New Zealand, marking the first visit by a Japanese Foreign Minister in the last 5 years. Last month, while attending the East Asia Summit, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held a summit meeting. The Prime Ministers and also the Foreign Ministers discussed strengthening the bilateral relationship and cooperation in the Pacific and confirmed their strong commitment to further deepen this "Strategic Cooperative Partnership."

(Economic relationship)

We have also seen our economic relationship advancing this year. This

November, the 45th Joint Meeting of the NZ-Japan Business Council was held in Auckland, where business leaders from both countries had a very productive exchange of views on boosting economic ties. Another highlight is that more than 7 countries including Japan and New Zealand have completed their domestic legal procedures to ratify CPTPP, the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, which will come into force on the 30th of December. This is expected to further strengthen the economic partnership between our two countries.

(Cultural ties)

Now, let me touch on our bilateral relationship from the perspective of grass-roots level. New Zealand and Japan have benefited from 43 long-standing sister city relationships. This year marks the 45th anniversary of the Sister City relationship between Christchurch and Kurashiki. While formal celebrations have been postponed because of July's devastating floods in Western Japan, Mayor Dalziel kindly visited Kurashiki in October and gave Kurashiki city the donation collected by the Christchurch people for those who suffered from the disaster. On behalf of Japan, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for your kind gesture.

Since I have assumed my role here, I have been so impressed with how much New Zealanders are interested in and appreciate Japanese culture.

In particular, I have heard that Japanese culture is deeply rooted in New Zealand, especially here in Christchurch and the people are very active in Japanese cultural activities. Close grass-roots relationships are built on the hard work of local people, which I truly appreciate.

Last not but least, I would like to remind you all of some future events taking place in Japan: firstly, the Rugby World Cup next September and October , in which I believe many players from the Crusaders will play as part of the All Blacks. On a side note, I also would like to congratulate the consecutive victories of the Crusaders in the Super Rugby this year. Following the Rugby World Cup, the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games will take place in 2020, the World Masters' Games in Kansai in 2021, and World Expo 2025 in Osaka, which Japan was chosen last month to host. These large international events are sure to give many people, especially New Zealanders, the chance to visit Japan and experience its culture first-hand and will serve to deepen the bonds between Japan and New Zealand.

The Government and people of Japan remain committed to further deepening the friendly and mutual understanding between our two countries and peoples through multiple spheres of engagement and collaboration.

As the Ambassador of Japan to New Zealand, I am re-affirming my re-

solve to continue working to bring the bilateral ties between New Zealand and Japan to greater heights.

Tonight, we have prepared some Japanese food and drinks for you to sample: sushi from the most famous Japanese restaurants in Christchurch, Kinji and Tomi, and Japanese authentic sake recently imported from Japan especially for tonight's function. I hope you will enjoy such Japanese cuisine and drinks as well as wonderful conversation among friends and colleagues.

In addition, we have also prepared some more entertainment which will later be performed by some talented groups from the Japanese community here in Christchurch. Firstly, the "Canterbury Japanese Choir," which has just sung the National Anthems with such beautiful voices, will introduce us to some very popular Japanese nostalgic songs which will evoke scenes reminding us of the four seasons in Japan. Secondly, the Japanese Koto group "Shiki," which has helped to create Japanese atmosphere at the entrance of this hall, will perform. Then, at last, we will have a special show by "Takumi" the highly popular Japanese drum group in Christchurch. So, please enjoy until the end of the reception.

In conclusion, let me propose a toast to Queen Elizabeth the Second, wishing Her Majesty long life and good health and wishing you all a

Merry Christmas and the happiest New Year. //end