

**AMBASSADOR KOBAYASHI'S SPEECH FOR THE
EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY RECEPTION**

Wednesday, 19 February 2020, the Public Trust Hall



The Right Honourable Trevor Mallard,
Speaker of the House of Representatives of New Zealand

Ms Andrea Smith,
Deputy Secretary, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
Trade, responsible for APEC 21, and the representative of
the Government of NZ for this reception

Distinguished Members of Parliament,
HE Mr Leasi Scanlan, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and
High Commissioner of Samoa
My Fellow Ambassadors,
Honorable guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

I am honoured to welcome you all to this reception, and I am grateful for your presence here tonight.

This reception marks the first occasion in NZ to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the new Emperor of Japan, Naruhito, since his ascension to the imperial throne on the 1st of May last year. From the day of his enthronement, a new era named "Reiwa" began in Japan, which means 'beautiful harmony'.

His Majesty, the first in the direct line of succession of our Imperial family to study abroad, has made many trips and official visits to foreign countries, including NZ.

Her Majesty the Empress Masako is a former career diplomat before marrying into the imperial family. Their Majesties have one child Princess Aiko, who is now 18 years old.

It has already been a year and four months since I arrived here as Ambassador of Japan to NZ. Since then, my wife and I have been enjoying NZ very much, especially its beautiful nature.

Japan and NZ are both advanced nations in the Asia-Pacific region sharing the common values of democracy, freedom, and the rule of law. We recognise that our collaboration is more important than ever before to address and resolve issues of great importance particularly in the international community.

Last year, PM Jacinda Ardern visited Japan in September for a summit meeting with Japan's PM ABE Shinzo. The two leaders subsequently issued the Japan-NZ Summit Joint Statement 2019, with the commitment to taking the strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries further to the next level in various areas.

In October Foreign Minister Winston Peters and his counterpart MOTEGI Toshimitsu held a meeting in Tokyo, which resulted in issuing the Joint Declaration on Cooperation in the Pacific Islands Region. Since then our two countries have been working on formulating concrete projects in the region. In November, Foreign Minister Peters visited Japan again to attend the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting upon invitation by Japan, making him the first NZ Foreign Minister to participate in this framework.

In trade and economy, we have also seen our relationship continue to thrive, thanks to the implementation of the CPTPP. In particular, we have seen the volume of NZ's key export products such as beef, dairy and kiwifruit increase to Japan.

The Japan-NZ Summit Joint Statement provides us with a new "post-CPTPP" direction in our bilateral economic relations. In the statement, we agreed to work closely in new areas such as renewable energy, outer space and others leading Japan and NZ's economic relationship to enter a new era.

Cultural and interpersonal connections have further deepened the cross-cultural understanding between Japan and NZ. In fact, there are now 44 sister cities between our two countries, and more than 70% of the population in NZ are living in those sister cities.

The hosting of the Rugby World Cup by Japan from September to November last year was a huge success. It was also memorable for the Japanese people because our national rugby team the "Brave Blossoms" defeated some of the world's best teams, and even reached the quarter-finals, to the great surprise of rugby fans around the world. Although the All Blacks were not able to make it to the finals, they significantly contributed to making rugby more popular than ever in Japan and around the world.

Japan is hosting the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo this year, as well as hosting the World Masters' Games in

Kansai next year in 2021, and the World Expo 2025 in Osaka. I hope many New Zealanders will come to Japan again and witness these prestigious international events while experiencing the culture and hospitality of the Japanese people.

As the Ambassador of Japan to NZ, I re-affirm my commitment and determination to continue working to the best of my ability in ensuring that our existing ties will continue to prosper.

Tonight, we have prepared some very authentic Japanese cuisine for you to sample, including sushi, and sake. Additionally, NANAMI, the Japanese group based in Wellington who just sang the national anthems of Japan and NZ, will also perform Japanese modern and traditional songs. Furthermore, we have a few booths from Japanese companies or Japan related companies, such as Obayashi, NZ Aluminium Smelters, and Tokyo Food, showing their business and products as good examples of Japan-NZ business relations.

E nga ri kua mutu nga Korero. No rei ra, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Now please join me in a toast to Queen Elizabeth the second, wishing Her Majesty, the Government and people of NZ and everyone here tonight the very best for this Year.

Please follow me in saying Kanpai.