

# **SPEECH FOR THE EMPEROR'S 85th BIRTHDAY RECEPTION**

Thursday, 13 December 2018, Wellington Club, Wellington



Hon Shane Jones, Minister of Forestry,  
Mr Michael Swain, Chief of Protocol of the Ministry of Foreign  
Affairs and Trade,  
Distinguished Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament,  
My Colleague Ambassadors and Madams,  
Honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen,

(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 here tonight. Let us all wish the continued good health of His Majesty. His Majesty Emperor Akihito will abdicate on the 30th 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 8<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Meeting in Japan, which were followed by other high level visits from both countries in the following months, and then in October, Foreign Minister Kono of Japan came to Wellington, 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 45<sup>th</sup> 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 30<sup>th</sup> of December. This is expected to further strengthen the economic partnership between our two countries.

Tonight, two Japanese companies which link Japan and New Zealand are joining us to display their operations and products. They are (1) NEC, with their globally acclaimed Face Recognition Technology, and (2) Obayashi, which contributed to the construction of the Waterview Tunnel in Auckland, and which has started construction of a pilot plant for hydrogen produced from geothermal energy in corporation with an Iwi trust. I hope you would explore their exhibitions during the reception.

(Cultural ties)

Now, let me touch on our bilateral relationship from the perspective of grass-roots level.

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

you know, around 20, 000 people visited the Japan Festival in Wellington last month, and 50,000 people visited the Japan Day in Auckland in February, to name just a few examples. This shows how fortunate we are to have so many big fans of Japan in New Zealand.

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 Hurricanes will play as part of the All Blacks. Following the Rugby World Cup, the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games take place in 2020, the World Masters' Games in Kansai in 2021, and World Expo 2025 in Osaka, which Japan was chosen to host only last month. 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 resolve to continue working to bring the bilateral ties between New Zealand and Japan to greater heights.

Tonight, we have prepared some very authentic Japanese food and drinks for you to sample, like sushi, and special sake which are not available in New Zealand so far and Funk Estate's beer which is produced by a Japanese brewery here in New Zealand. Additionally, Tokyo Foods, which trades in Japanese food products in New Zealand, would like to entertain your taste buds, offering some sake tasting and knowledge about Sake. Afterwards, the Japanese singer group, NANAMI, based in Wellington, will sing National anthems of Japan and New Zealand and also perform Japanese modern and traditional songs. I hope you will enjoy the Japanese cuisine and performance.

Let me propose a toast to Queen Elizabeth the second, wishing Her Majesty and everyone here tonight all the very best for the New Year.