

## **SPEECH FOR THE EMPEROR'S 84th BIRTHDAY RECEPTION**

Wednesday, 6 December 2017 at the Wellington Club

(Te Reo-Mihi)

Honourable Ministers of the Government of New Zealand;

Honourable Members of Parliament;

The Representative of the Government of New Zealand and Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr Ben King;

Excellencies, Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Honourable guests, Dear friends, ladies and gentlemen;

I am honoured to welcome you all to this reception to celebrate the 84<sup>th</sup> birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan and I am grateful for your presence tonight.

As we look towards the end of a very interesting year to say the least, I would first and foremost like to express my sincere gratitude for another year of the strong partnership and closer cooperation between Japan and New Zealand.

I am especially grateful for the years of collaboration between the Government of Japan and the previous Government of New Zealand, the highlight of which was the visit of the former Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Bill English, to Japan in May this year. Under the stewardship of the previous Government the relationships between our leaders and governments have deepened greatly.

Another highlight of our bilateral relationship this year was Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's first bilateral summit meeting on the occasion of the recent APEC Leaders' meetings in Vietnam, where they had very fruitful discussions, renewing the commitment to further advance the relationship between our two countries. Such face-to-face meetings especially so soon after Prime Minister Ardern took office are some of the best ways to ensure the continuing cordial relationship between our leaders and I look forward to continue to work closely with the new Government to further strengthen the friendly and close relationship between our two countries. I am also pleased to note that our Foreign Ministers met at the same APEC meetings.

There are many fields of collaboration between Japan and New Zealand, as two nations in the Indo-Pacific Region sharing common fundamental values of democracy, freedom, and the rule of law.

But this is not just limited to our bilateral relationship. In the international arena, we constantly work together to address issues facing both the region and the world, ranging from efforts to maintain and advance international peace and security, with issues such as the nuclear and missile development of North Korea, along with the unresolved abduction issue, through to proactively forging regional standards and trade rules through agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), that we both remain committed to concluding and bringing a multitude of benefits to both our two countries and to the wider region.

We also cooperate fully at regional and international bodies such as the United Nations to promote the efforts of the international community in addressing the most pressing issues of the day.

Against this backdrop of cooperation on the international stage, Japan-New Zealand bilateral engagements have continued to deepen and prosper.

In addition to the exchanges at the highest level of government, Officials continue to engage at many levels. For example, on defence cooperation, exchanges between our Defence Ministries and Defence Forces have strengthened since the signing of the Memorandum of Intent on Exchange and Cooperation in 2013 to improve our capabilities to jointly address wide-ranging security issues, including disaster relief.

Last year a Japan Maritime Defence Force vessel and P-1 Patrol Aircraft participated in the NZ Navy's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary International Naval Review as well as assist with operations in the immediate aftermath of the Kaikoura Earthquake. This year, the Royal NZ Navy Vessel Te Kaha visited Japan in June and a Japan Air Self Defence Force C-2 Transport Aircraft visited New Zealand last month for various exchanges.

With regard to trade and the economy, understanding and mutual appreciation for each other continues to deepen. New Zealand is an important source of primary products for Japan, and a number of Japanese companies have made significant investments here bringing economic benefits to both local communities and New Zealand as a whole.

In November, I had the privilege to attend the 44<sup>th</sup> Joint Meeting of the NZ-Japan Business Council held in Osaka, Japan, a candidate city for 2025 World Expo., where more than 100 business leaders from both countries had very productive discussions to further business opportunities between our two countries.

I would like to share with you a very exciting and mouth-watering story that I heard at this meeting. New Zealanders love eating grapes and New Zealand is a major grape growing country. However the grapes grown in New Zealand are almost exclusively used for making wine and New Zealand imports large quantities of table grapes from countries like Australia, the U.S., and Chile. What a pity.

However, New Zealand's climate and soil can also grow table grapes and, a small, rather I should say, a micro Japanese agri-firm named "Budou Senshin", the literal translation is "Wholeheartedly Grapes" is trying to expand its production of very delicious and high quality table grapes at its Napier vineyard by combining Japanese know-how and techniques with New Zealand's ideal natural conditions. So I am sure that in the not so distant future, people in both New Zealand and Japan will be able to enjoy eating delicious grapes grown in New Zealand, not just wine.

Tonight, there are several Japanese companies that operate in New Zealand are displaying their operations and products. They are (1) NEC, with their world acclaimed Face Recognition Technology, and (2) New Zealand Aluminium Smelters (NZAS), who produce some of the world's best quality aluminium in Invercargill. Also, Oji Fibre Solutions has some products on display and has some items for you to take home when you leave tonight.

Tokyo Foods, which trades in Japanese food products, would also like to entertain your taste buds with some sake tasting, and additionally to these specific companies, we are also serving Steinlager "Tokyo Dry" beer produced by Lion, which is part of the Japanese beverages company Kirin. I hope that tonight you will enjoy seeing, tasting, and learning more about quality Japanese products.

In the sphere of people-to-people exchanges, I am pleased to note that we have 41 warm and close sister city relationships including between Wellington and Sakai City, and Hutt and Minoh City and there are ongoing efforts to

continue to forge new sister city alliances. The existing relationships have fostered active people to people exchanges at many levels across New Zealand and I am convinced that these longstanding relationships will continue to be springboards for new and expanded endeavours between our two countries.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) continues to provide an opportunity for young and highly talented Kiwis to teach English in Japan. New Zealand has participated in the programme since its inaugural year, and throughout the years more than 3,100 Kiwis have participated in the Programme. Whilst in Japan they have worked as goodwill ambassadors for New Zealand, and when they return to New Zealand they continue as goodwill ambassadors for Japan. Similarly through over 30 years of the working holiday scheme, youth aged 18 to 30 from both of our countries have experienced life in New Zealand and Japan, getting an up close and personal experience on what it is like to live in each other's countries and see first-hand what they each have to offer.

I am also happy to mention that Japanese tourists to New Zealand have continued to increase in number, surpassing the 100,000 benchmark this year, while almost 60,000 New Zealanders visited Japan last year.

I think it is very safe to say that these mutual visits by the citizens of our two countries will continue to multiply in coming years.

Japan is set to host a number of global sports events including the Rugby World Cup in 2019, the Olympics and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in 2020, and the World Masters Games in the Kansai region in 2021.

During the former Prime Minister's visit in May, it was very exciting to hear the announcement that the All Blacks will play a test match in Japan in November 2018, during that same visit a Memorandum of Cooperation between our Sports Agencies was signed paving the way for various future collaborations between Japan and New Zealand to take advantage of the opportunities that will arise from these global festivals of sports in Japan.

As for the Olympics, there are already multiple offers from across Japan to host the New Zealand national team, allowing local communities in Japan to interact with both team members and sports fans from New Zealand and we expect more hands to be raised as we get closer to each of the events.

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 new greater heights.

I would like to conclude my remarks by expressing my appreciation to my Embassy staff for all their hard work over the past year and specifically for the preparation of this reception. I also wish to express my appreciation to the Wellington Club and its staff for this beautiful venue and all their work tonight.

(Te Reo-closing)

*Now please join me in a toast to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the second, Queen of New Zealand and the Government and people of New Zealand.*