

Speech for IPU Graduation Ceremony By Ambassador Takata

11 December, 2017

IPU Chairman, Mr Hiroshi Ohashi,
IPU President Mr Wayne Edwards,
Palmerston North City Councillors,
(他)

Dear students,

Kia Ora Koutou

I would like to begin by giving my most sincere congratulations to the students graduating from IPU at this ceremony. You must be proud of yourselves for all that you have achieved during the years of study which led you to today. It is my pleasure to be able to speak for you on such a celebratory occasion.

IPU New Zealand gives students from all over the world a particularly strong foundation in international relations and Japanese studies, in an environment that facilitates the building of strong friendships between New Zealand and international students from abroad. The opening of the second campus in Japan has also given rise to many opportunities for student exchanges between New Zealand and Japan. This type of grassroots level exchange results in the local and exchange students of both campuses having the opportunity to prepare for their lives as global citizens. Students are given the chance to learn about international issues while also being provided with a great place to practise language skills with native speakers in a non-judgemental environment. This is a head start to life in our rapidly internationalising world, which I hope you will not take for granted.

Graduates of IPU much like yourselves are making use of this head start within New Zealand and abroad, be it pursuing further academic study, teaching English, starting and managing international businesses, or working in government capacities for international relations. These IPU graduates are good examples of the bright future ahead.

Not only from a business perspective, but also from one of personal relationships, students of IPU excel. I truly believe that the skills in cooperation and intercultural understanding that you have strengthened everyday with each interaction with other students and people in your community are essential to creating a world in harmony. These interpersonal skills, along with a respect for different people, cultures and customs, will stand out in any community that you may find yourself in.

Between Japan and New Zealand especially, we are lucky enough to already have major assets in place to continue the promotion of good international relationships through people-to-people exchange. I am of course talking about the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme and the many sister city relationships between the two countries. Roughly 100 young kiwis are selected to teach English in schools or work in local government offices across Japan as part of the JET programme and it fills me with pride to tell you that many of these organisations specifically request participants from New Zealand. I am aware that some graduates of IPU are currently applying for the JET programme. I wish you the best of luck in your endeavours.

As for sister cities, there are 41 different cities in New Zealand with an official sister relationship to a city in Japan. This is New Zealand's highest number of sister city relationships with a single foreign country! This shows how successful we have been so far to create a bridge between our two nations. I hope that you will continue to promote mutual understanding among all different cultures and peoples around the world.

Needless to say, it is very important to keep these people to people exchanges alive and flourishing, as each connection between individuals in turn strengthens the connection between our communities and countries. I am optimistic that you will all be part of our efforts to forge a stronger bond between New Zealand and Japan. As ambassadors of IPU New Zealand, I expect your lives will hold many chances to foster ties with people from not just Japan, but across the entire globe, and based on the experiences you have gained here I expect you will all jump at these chances to contribute to international relations and intercultural understanding.

In Japan, guest speakers at a graduation ceremony will often give a life lesson to graduating students. Following this tradition, I would like to pass on this inspiration to you: “一生学び続ける”. This, as you may know, translates to “keep learning for a lifetime”. No matter what you choose to do in your lives, I hope that you will take these words to heart. As humans, the ability to continue to grow and learn is a unique trait. It is therefore something we should cherish and continue to do throughout our lives. Just because you have finished with university does not mean that you have finished learning! As a diplomat, each time I am assigned to a new posting, I must learn the country's customs, climate and geography as well as its politics, economic background and so on. My study never really finished after university and I'm sure neither will yours. But don't worry, the fact that you have successfully graduated from IPU today means that you are prepared to move on to the next stage of learning in your life.

As you know, there are some very exciting events taking place in Japan over the next few years: the Rugby World Cup in 2019, the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020, and the Kansai World Masters Games in 2021. These international events are all wonderful chances to promote Japan to the rest of the world, but they are also a chance for people from around the world to build relationships with Japan and the Japanese people. Whether your interests lie in sport, education, culture, or beyond, there is no better time to be actively connected to Japan.

In closing, I would like to say congratulations once again. As now is the time for you to take your next steps, I would like to urge you to always hunger for more knowledge. Even as you leave your studies behind you to embark on new endeavours, I encourage you to challenge yourselves to reach for more knowledge and experience. I assure you, no matter what job or position you may have, you will always need the ability to learn new skills. I wish each and every one of you success in your life.

Thank you.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa