

Joint Opening Address by Ambassador Takata
At the Sister Cities Conference 2017 Invercargill
8:50, Friday, 5th May 2017

Your Worship, Mr. Tim Shadbolt, Mayor of Invercargill,
Mr. Kiyoshi Tomioka, Mayor of Kumagaya City, Japan,
Distinguished Mayors present,
Ms. Hiromi Morris, President of SCNZ,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kia ora Koutou.

Thank you for having me here this morning, and for inviting me to be a part of the Sister Cities New Zealand 2017 Conference. In particular, I would like to express my appreciation to Mayor Shadbolt for hosting this year's conference in his beautiful city of Invercargill.

It is a pleasure to be here with you again at this conference after I attended last year's conference in Nelson, as a panelist. This year, I am honoured to be addressing you as a joint opening speaker, alongside Mr. Kiyoshi Tomioka, the Mayor of Kumagaya City in Japan, which has a strong sister city relationship with Invercargill.

At present, there are 41 sister city relationships between Japan and New Zealand, as well as ongoing efforts to forge new sister city alliances each year. These existing close relationships, forged through various exchange activities over many years, provide our bilateral relations between New Zealand and Japan with a solid basis at the grass-roots level. As an Ambassador of Japan to New Zealand, I am very fortunate and grateful for that. I wish to express my deep appreciation and respect to those persons at working at city councils and sister city associations, without whose dedication and hard work the sister city relationships are not sustainable.

The theme of this year's conference is "Communication Overcoming Distance". With these key words of "distance" and "sister cities", a famous phrase from the Analects of Confucius comes to mind. Confucius was a great Chinese philosopher from 2500 years ago. His analects were introduced to Japan through Korea somewhere between

1000 and 1500 years ago, and have made an enormous impact on the formation of Japanese spiritual culture. The English translation of the phrase is, "Is it not a joy to have friends come from afar?" or "I have friends who come to see me from far away! For which should I not be called the happiest man?" This great philosopher and wise man is suggesting that a friend visiting from distant parts, to see you, is one of the purest and most enjoyable experiences we can have in our lives. I think that this is the essence of sister city relationships.

But, of course, there is a somewhat deeper meaning in this phrase. Your friends are people with whom you have chosen to be close to, and they surely have something wonderful to share, driving you to learn more about them. Likewise, surely your friends also share that vision, believing that you, too, have something exciting to offer. Through that mutual friendship, we can learn from each other, and enrich ourselves. This is also the essence of sister city relationships. Sister Cities enrich each other through mutual visits and various exchange activities involving culture, sport, trade, and so on.

From this perspective, I highly appreciate the crucial role that Sister Cities New Zealand plays in exploring the best practices of sister city relationships country-wide. The aim to share and adopt successful techniques and activities into other sister cities, both in New Zealand and other countries, is a laudable goal. It is my sincere hope that this conference will be a great success.

As I am sure many of you are aware, Japan will be hosting several global sports events in the coming years; namely: The Rugby World Cup in 2019, the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020, and the Kansai World Masters Games in 2021. Mayor Kiyoshi Tomioka's city of Kumagaya even has the honour of being one of the 12 venues for the Rugby World Cup matches! I hope many of you will be able to visit Japan, and enjoy these exciting events while immersing yourself in our country's unique culture and hospitality, especially alongside the people of your counterpart sister cities.

Thank you very much.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.