

Speech by Ambassador Takata  
At the opening ceremony of Minoh Sister City Art Exchange Exhibition  
18:00 Monday, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2017

Mr. Ray Wallace, Mayor of Hutt City

Mr. Minoru Kugo, the President of Art Association of Minoh City

Mr. David Balm, the President of Hutt Art Society

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kia Ora Koutou.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you tonight for the opening ceremony of the “Minoh Sister City Art Exchange Exhibition”. First of all, I would like to convey my appreciation to the Hutt Art Society for hosting this event, and also to the members of the Art Association of Minoh City, who travelled far from Japan just to share with us their inspired artworks at this exhibition.

Japan and New Zealand have a long standing friendship inspired by our sharing of fundamental societal values and rule of law. Every year, hundreds of thousands of Japanese citizens visit this country, attracted by its famous natural beauty, the hospitality of its kind-hearted people, and its strong diversity of culture. Aside from these Japanese tourists, there are now more than nine thousand Japanese students who are studying in New Zealand.

As we all know, Minoh City and Hutt City have been working closely together for twenty-two years now since the establishment of their sister city relationship in 1995. At present, there are 41 sister city relationships spread all across our two countries and I believe that the engagement between Minoh City and Hutt City at the grassroots level is one of the most active and productive amongst them.

This art exhibition serves as a source of close civic exchange between our peoples, and activities such as this are extremely useful for promoting further a cultural understanding between New Zealand and Japan. I hope that Minoh City and Hutt City will continue such meaningful exchanges well into the future, creating more opportunities to further deepen the connections between our two great nations.

As many of you know, Japan will be hosting global sports events in the coming years, namely; the Rugby World Cup in 2019, the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games in 2020, and the World Masters Games in Kansai in 2021. I hope many New Zealanders, including, perhaps, some of you, will be able to visit Japan and witness these exciting international sports events while enjoying yourselves with the country's unique culture and the hospitality of the Japanese people.

Before ending my speech, I would like to give my best wishes for the success of this wonderful art exhibition, and to the further development of the Art Associations of Minoh City and Hutt Art Society. And I would like to take this opportunity as well to thank the Hutt City Council, through the dynamic leadership of Mayor Ray Wallace, for its continuing and active support to the Lower Hutt-Minoh sister city relationship. Once again, thank you for inviting me tonight.