

Speech on the Conferral Ceremony for Ambassador Phillip Gibson

5:30 PM Wednesday, 19 July 2017

Japanese Ambassador's Residence, Khandallah, Wellington

**Ambassador Phillip Gibson and members of the Gibson family
Respected Former Colleagues of Ambassador Gibson at MFAT
(Mr Neil Walter)**

(Mr Brook Barrington, Chief Executive and Secretary of MFAT)

Mr John McArthur, Strategic Policy Adviser of MFAT

**Mr Simon Murdoch, Deputy Chairman of the Asia-NZ
Foundation's Board of Trustees**

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen:

I am very honoured and pleased that you are all able to join me here this evening to celebrate the conferment for Ambassador Phillip Gibson of Christchurch, New Zealand, who has been awarded with the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star by His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

This prestigious award is in recognition of Ambassador Gibson's great contributions towards the promotion of mutual understanding and friendly relations between Japan and New Zealand in various fields and initiatives, but in particular as the former Chief Executive of the Asia 2000 Foundation (now Asia New Zealand Foundation) from 1996 to 1999 in which he expanded the multitier relationship between the two countries; and as Ambassador of New Zealand to Japan between 1999 and 2004 in which he heightened the Japan-New Zealand relationship into a "new level relationship"; and lastly but not least, as New Zealand Commissioner General for the Aichi World Expo in 2005, in which he was the key architect of the great success of the New Zealand pavilion and introducing the ordinary Japanese and Kiwi people to the many charms that each other's country has to offer.

We remember with great appreciation when the devastating earthquake struck Christchurch in 2011, how Ambassador Gibson provided invaluable assistance, to Japan and to the bereaved families of the Japanese victims of the catastrophe. At this particular juncture wherein both our governments and peoples were working in solidarity to overcoming the disastrous aftermath of this tragedy, Ambassador Gibson had made a significant contribution towards enhancing further the mutual friendship and respect between Japan and New Zealand.

Ambassador Gibson is currently the Special Envoy for Disaster Risk Management, and Special Adviser and Director Christchurch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, which is an earthquake prone country like Japan. It is my firm belief and hope that Ambassador Gibson will continue to render his support towards working and collaborating with Japan in disaster management. I cannot stress enough the gratitude we and the Japanese families feel in having Ambassador Gibson's continuous involvement in the annual commemoration of the 2011 Canterbury Earthquake.

Having been extensively involved in various capacities toward Japan, Ambassador Gibson is one of the best friends Japan could wish for in New Zealand. We hope he would continue to be the vital catalyst for more diverse modes of exchanges, interactions, and collaborations to further strengthening and deepening the already flourishing bilateral ties between our two countries and peoples.

As all of you, old friends of Ambassador Gibson, know better than I do, he is a sincere, polite and dignified person. My Embassy's daily contact with Ambassador Gibson is usually through telephone between Wellington and Christchurch. Whatever the subject may be, and whoever talks to Ambassador Gibson, his attitude at the other end of the line is always calm, kind, warm and full of sense of responsibility. He is a man of integrity.

Let me conclude my remarks by expressing once again my heartfelt congratulations to Ambassador Gibson on being bestowed this decoration, and I wish for his continued good health, happiness, and success to all his current and future undertakings. THANK YOU.