

Speech on the Investiture of Mrs Adrienne Staples

5:30 PM Friday, 30 June 2017

at the Japanese Residence in Khandallah, Wellington

Mrs Adrienne Staples and her family members

(Mr Ron Mark, MP)

Mayors and Deputy Mayors of the Wairarapa Region

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen:

I am very pleased that you are all able to join me here this afternoon to celebrate the investiture of Mrs Adrienne Staples of Featherston, New Zealand, who has been awarded with the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, from His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. I feel honoured to convey, on behalf of the Government and people of Japan, our gratitude for the wonderful and longstanding work that Mrs Staples has done over the past years.

This prestigious award is in recognition of Mrs Staples' contributions to the promotion of mutual understanding and friendly relations between Japan and New Zealand. In particular, she has spearheaded the commemorative ceremonies of the 1943 Featherston Incident at the Japanese Memorial Garden in Featherston for the past twelve years during the time she was Mayor of South Wairarapa.

The 1943 incident in Featherston resulted in the loss of 48 Japanese prisoners and one New Zealand guard. At that particular juncture of history, there was a raging world war involving Japan against the Allied Forces including New Zealand— of which the massive destruction of properties and infrastructures, and loss of lives were beyond compare in the history of mankind. We must never forget what had happened during that year, including at Featherston, and the disastrous outcome of war in the years before and after, as we move forward towards strengthening further our two countries' friendship based on mutual understanding and shared fundamental democratic and societal values.

It also was during Mrs Staples' role as Chair of the Featherston Community Board that Chor-Farmer, a group of male singers from Japan, began to include holding a regular concert in Featherston as part of their biennial goodwill tour. Mrs Staples has continuously provided her strong support for the visits, and the Chor-Farmer Male Voice Choir has continually been paving the way for direct "people-to-people" linkages between the peoples of our two countries and in greater Wellington region, especially in Featherston where music has truly connected hearts and cultivated the bonds of friendship.

I understand there may have still been many instances of difficulties during Mrs Staples' efforts to hold the ceremonies remembering the Featherston incident and supporting the hosting of Chor-Farmer's visits. When I called her earlier this year to inform her of this conferral, I was very impressed and moved by her remarks that she would consider that this award was for the efforts of all the Featherston community and the greater Wairarapa region over the years, and that she would receive it on behalf of them all. I would like to reiterate my admiration for her courageous efforts to bring to the region's Japanese and Kiwi communities together, and express my appreciation for all who have been involved in continuing this tradition of mutual respect, understanding, and friendship, many of whom are present today.

Mrs Adrienne is now a Councillor of the Greater Wellington Regional Council representing the Wairarapa Constituency, and in her new capacity, she has constantly and actively supported the activities in the District like this year's commemoration of the 74th Yr Anniversary of the Featherston Incident and the re-opening of the Featherston Heritage Museum, which displays the carved and painted artworks of the Japanese prisoners at the Featherston camp. Without doubt, these activities continue to fortify and deepen the mutual understanding between Japan and New Zealand.

I hope that Mrs Staples will continue to contribute to the promotion of mutual understanding and friendly relations between Japan and New Zealand, and the Embassy looks forward to continuing close collaborations with her and the South Wairarapa community.

Let me conclude my remarks by expressing once again my heartfelt congratulations to Mrs Staples for receiving the decoration, and I wish for his continued good health, happiness, and success.

Thank you.