

Speech for the 2018 Sister Cities Conference in Palmerston North
by HE Mr Hiroyasu Kobayashi
21 March 2019

Your Worship, Mr Grant Smith, Mayor of Palmerston North,
Mr Yoshinori Tenma, Mayor of Mihara City,
Distinguished Mayors and Councillors of various cities in New Zealand,
Mrs Hiromi Morris, President of Sister Cities New Zealand,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kia Ora Koutou, and thank you for your presence here today. I am honoured and delighted to be one of the co-hosts of this reception for 2019's Sister Cities New Zealand Conference. This is my first attendance after beginning my tenure in New Zealand in October of last year, and I am very excited to take part.

Sister City relationships are defined as “a legal or social agreement between cities to promote cultural and commercial ties”. But they are so much more than that! Sister Cities create an environment for residents of each city to learn about each other's countries, cultures, language and people; they create the foundation for a mutual friendship where we learn from each other, care for each other, and most of all celebrate our differences. This, I believe, is something which we need more than ever right now. In encouraging the enrichment of international Sister City relationships, we enrich ourselves. I expect that the upcoming days of this conference will hold many fruitful discussions and result in new and optimistic ideas for continuing the strong and friendly connections that New Zealand shares with the rest of the world. I hope for only the best of outcomes and results from this conference.

I would like to sincerely thank Mrs Hiromi Morris, President of Sister Cities New Zealand, for her continuing efforts in the creation and upkeep of New Zealand's Sister Cities. Just two days ago, I was fortunate enough to award her with the Ambassador's Commendation; an award for those who have made a distinguished contribution to the mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and their country of residence. In fact, her efforts have resulted in the creation of the 44th Sister City relationship between Japan and New Zealand: Mihara City in Hiroshima Prefecture, and this beautiful city, Palmerston North. I would like to offer the mayors of both cities my sincere

congratulations; I hope that this relationship will flourish with the same strength and positivity that other Japan and New Zealand Sister Cities enjoy.

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 activities and experiences into other sister cities, both in New Zealand and other countries, is a laudable goal. Furthermore, I wish to express my deep appreciation and respect to those working at city councils and sister city associations, without whose dedication and hard work sister city relationships are not sustainable.

I cannot close this speech before mentioning this stunning venue, the New Zealand Rugby Museum. I would like to express my most sincere thanks to the Rugby Museum Society of New Zealand, for letting us hold the reception in such a beautiful place, and at such an appropriate time. As you all know, the Rugby World Cup will be hosted by Japan this year; the first time in history that an Asian country has hosted. We have high expectations as always, for the performance of the New Zealand All Blacks, and I'm sure the World Cup will be a catalyst for many New Zealanders to visit Japan.

The future opportunities for our two countries could not be more abundant, and we are in the best position to bring our relationship higher than it has ever been before. Connections between Japan and New Zealand are increasing in number and strength due to the combined efforts of not only those at the grassroots level, but above as well. New Zealand and Japan have, especially in recent times, had visits between high level parties, which once again have contributed to the strengthening of our friendly mutual bond.

This year's Rugby World Cup is just the beginning of several international events to be hosted in Japan in the upcoming years. Following the Rugby World Cup, there will be the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020, the Kansai World Masters Games in 2021, and the Osaka World Expo in 2025! 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. I hope to be able to see many of you at the Rugby World Cup in Japan later this year. Now, I would like to show a short promotion video of the Rugby World Cup 2019, so please enjoy. [video]

Thank you very much. Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.