

Sponsor Address by Ambassador Takata
At the Sister Cities Conference NZ 2018, Lower Hutt
7:30pm, Friday, 25th May 2018

Your Worship, Mr Ray Wallace, Mayor of Lower Hutt,
Mr Tetsuro Kurata, Mayor of Minoh City, Japan,
Distinguished Mayors and Councillors present,
Ms. Hiromi Morris, President of SCNZ,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kia ora Koutou.

Thank you for having me here this evening, and for inviting me to be a part of the Sister Cities New Zealand 2018 Conference. In particular, I would like to express my appreciation to Mayor Ray Wallace for hosting this year's conference in his beautiful city of Lower Hutt. I live in Wellington, but I commute to Hutt City, the first Garden City, every weekend to enjoy golf.

It is a pleasure to be here with all of you once again, after I attended last year's Sister Cities conference in Invercargill. This year, I am delighted to be addressing you as a joint host for this evening's dinner alongside Sister Cities New Zealand, whom we have to thank for this splendid conference. As for our dinner's surprise location, I am certain that you are all as enchanted with Pencarrow Lodge's thoughtful hospitality as I am. My thanks to the conference organisers for their wonderful choice of venue, and I invite all of you to enjoy your time here to the fullest extent.

My speech should be a short one, because this morning I was reminded by one of the speakers that it is dangerous to stand too long between the kiwi people and their coffee and dessert. My previous assignment abroad was in Kenya, where I was told not to stand between lakes, water, and hippos. At present, there are 42 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 a grass-roots level. As the 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 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 "Connecting Globally Through Technology". Reflecting on this theme, I found my thoughts drifting immediately to Lower Hutt City's own sister city relationship with Minoh City. From digital communications and projects, to regular Skype calls such as the one we had this very afternoon, technology has always been one of the most highly-valued and utilised means of exchange between these two cities. I consider Minoh and Lower Hutt's sister city relationship to be one of the strongest I have witnessed, and certainly one of the most active. Technology, I believe, has played no small part in encouraging and nurturing this ongoing relationship. Using and applying all kinds of different methods to stay connected with people, no matter the distance: I think this is the essence of sister city relationships.

But, of course, this kind of continued growth does not happen in a vacuum! No, it is due to the consistent efforts and leadership of Mayors Ray Wallace and Tetsuro Kurata that we are able to see the flourishing of this sister city relationship in such concrete ways. Even now, visitors to Lower Hutt City can enjoy the Hutt Minoh Friendship House, a physical embodiment of their strong commitment to ongoing friendly relations. Indeed, the Mayors of both cities act as the head representatives for the Hutt Minoh Friendship House's Board of Trustees! Through this mutual friendship, we can learn from each other, and while encouraging the enrichment of international sister city relationships, enrich ourselves in turn. This is also the essence of sister city relationships.

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 continue to be an ongoing and great success, both this year, and well into the future.

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 Tetsuro Kurata's city of Minoh even has the honour of being one of the host venues for the New Zealand Olympic and Paralympic Games teams in 2020! 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.

Once again, thank you very much, and please enjoy the rest of your evening.
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.