

**Your Worship, Mr. Andy Foster, Mayor of Wellington,
Mr. Tokihiro Nakano, Deputy Mayor of Sakai City, Japan,
Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen,
Kia Ora Koutou, こんにちは, and good evening.**



It is my great privilege and honour to speak to you today as we celebrate 25 years of sister city relations between Sakai and Wellington. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Andy Foster on his recent election as the new mayor of Wellington. We have much to celebrate today!

25 years is a significant length of time. It is a quarter of a century; it could be a generation. It is a long enough time to change structures or power balances of cities or even countries. However, one thing has not changed: Wellington and Sakai's strong sister city relations, which I am proud and thrilled to see continuing on to this day. An excellent example of the fruits of this long-standing relationship was seen earlier this year in April, when the Sakai-based manufacturer of resilient water pipe infrastructure, Kurimoto Ltd., chose the Wellington Region as the location for its first international venture. The launch of their pilot water pipe project, in

partnership with Wellington Water in Porirua, was an excellent start to the two city's shared festivities.

Japan and New Zealand have the honour of sharing 44 sister city relationships, the oldest of which—Christchurch and Kurashiki—was established in 1973. With this incredible number, it should come as no surprise that more than 70% of all New Zealanders live in a place with a Japan sister city relationship! The Embassy of Japan considers these sister city relationship to be one of the most important diplomatic assets we share, and they serve as a launching point for a variety of sports, cultural and business exchanges. It is for this reason that the Embassy of Japan hopes to further strengthen the relationship between Sakai and Wellington, and broaden the variety of exchanges and activities shared between the two cities, as well as between Japan and New Zealand as a whole. When I look at the group of supporters around me today, I believe it is in good hands.

Indeed, in the last few months, relations between our two countries have been particularly strong. In September, The Right Honourable Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, paid an official visit to Japan and had a bilateral summit talk with PM Abe. H.E. The Right Honourable Dame Patsy Reddy, Governor-General of New Zealand, kindly attended the Enthronement Ceremony of His Imperial Majesty Naruhito, the Emperor of Japan as a representative, for which we are very grateful. Furthermore, Japan as a nation was able to host a successful Rugby World Cup, overcoming hardships and acting as the first host in the Asiatic region. Both Japan and New Zealand fought hard, showing their tenacious spirit and heart to the world. With Japan breaking into the final 8, and New Zealand collecting the bronze medal, I think they can both be proud—and push to even greater heights in 2023!

Now, I would like to tell you a little about what else is coming up on the horizon of Japan and New Zealand, now that the Rugby World Cup has concluded. First, as you know, Japan will host the Tokyo Olympic and

Paralympic Games in 2020, and we are less than one year away! There are host towns set up all across Japan, ready to receive athletes from all participating countries. New Zealand's host towns include: Beppu, in Oita Prefecture, who have a sister city relationship with Rotorua, and have already had a lot of rugby related events with New Zealand; Kyotanba in Kyoto Prefecture, who has a New Zealand JET participant coaching field hockey; and finally Minoh, in Osaka prefecture, which has a sister city relationship with Hutt City, to be celebrated this Sunday at the Hutt Japan Day. I sincerely hope that many of you here today will be able to go to Japan next year, and visit some of these wonderful host town locations, as well as see some thrilling Olympic and Paralympic events. After 2020, the Kansai World Masters Games will be held in 2021, and the Osaka World Expo in 2025. With so much on the horizon, I hope you will all mark your calendars, and prepare your personal and professional budgets. I look forward to meeting with you in Japan for these events!

Once again, thank you for allowing me the honour of addressing you here tonight, and please accept my heartfelt congratulations on 25 years of wonderful sister city relationship between Sakai and Wellington. 有り難うございます, and have an excellent evening.