

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

Good evening. I'm honoured to welcome you all to this reception which celebrates the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. Thank you for joining us this evening.

[Cyclone Gabrielle, Christchurch earthquake, East Japan Great Earthquake]

Firstly, please let me offer my condolences and sympathy to all those affected by Cyclone Gabrielle, including to the families of those who lost their lives. Many homes and businesses have suffered extensive damage and face a long recovery. Japan stands with the people of New Zealand, as we have stood with you, and as you have stood by us in the past. Just as Japan supported New Zealand after the 2011 Canterbury Earthquake, we will never forget how quick New Zealand was to respond when the Great East Japan Earthquake struck 17 days later.

[His Majesty's birthday message]

At the Enthronement ceremony in 2019, His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito proclaimed that "I pledge that I shall fulfill my responsibility as the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people of Japan". On February 23rd, His Majesty turned 63 years old and he had his very first birthday public gathering. Great joy and happiness were shared by the people of Japan to be able to hold the public gathering after a series of cancellations due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

[Japan-NZ relations: diplomatic and political relations]

Distinguished guests. Japan and New Zealand celebrated the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations last year. The Japan-New Zealand Strategic Cooperative Partnership is underpinned by shared basic values of democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law. Our partnership has grown far better and stronger in realising a free and open Indo-Pacific in the anniversary year.

Ms Jacinda Ardern, the former Prime Minister, most recently visited Japan in April last year. This was the very first overseas trip by the New Zealand Prime Minister after the onset of the pandemic. Ms Ardern and the Japanese Prime Minister Mr Kishida agreed on many points throughout their candid discussions on bilateral relations, international affairs and cooperation for peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

You may have seen the viral video of two giant Kiwifruit mascots swaying to classical Japanese music at an event held by Zespri during the Prime Minister's visit. The Kiwi Brothers, as the mascots are called, are familiar faces in TV adverts broadcast nationwide in Japan and this dancing video with Ms Ardern made the mascots even more popular.

After this visit to Japan, the two Prime Ministers met again in Madrid, and then in New York. This marked the most frequent meetings between our Prime Ministers in a single year. There were also a number of ministerial level visits and exchanges that

took place in both directions. New Zealand Energy and Resources Minister Ms Megan Woods went to Tokyo in September last year for bilateral co-operations on renewable energy. This year, Mr MOTEGI Toshimitsu, Secretary General of the ruling party LDP, came to Auckland and met with several New Zealand political leaders, and two weeks ago Trade and Export Growth Minister Mr Damien O’Conner went to Tokyo and had discussions with his CPTPP counterparts.

Very recently just last week, Foreign Minister Ms Nanaia Mahuta was in Tokyo where she met Foreign Minister Mr HAYASHI Yoshimasa. The two ministers had very good discussions on many issues of our common interests and issued the Joint Declaration on Cooperation in the Pacific Islands Region. Minister Mahuta’s visit to Japan was also an important opportunity to further promote Japan – Māori business partnership. The visit set a clear direction for the way forward for our two countries. .

[Security and defense]

For promoting peace and security in the region, Japan and New Zealand are now working even closer for defence co-operation. We have witnessed emergency humanitarian assistance to Tonga by the Japan Self-Defence Force about a year ago with support from NZ government, New Zealand Navy vessel Aotearoa’s participation in International Fleet Review held by the Japan Maritime Self- Defence Force and on-going negotiations for a bilateral information security agreement, to name but a few.

[Economic relationship]

Distinguished guests. Food and agriculture are the traditional backbone of the Japan-New Zealand business partnership. Over the last 50 years, Japanese companies have been valued as trusted and long-term investors in this field.

A new chapter has already begun. The bilateral summit meeting in last April identified four areas, namely digital, technology, services, and space, that both countries will put emphasis on for further growth.

Cooperation in clean energy also opens a new horizon. Japanese companies such as Obayashi and Mitsui are active in hydrogen production and distribution network building in New Zealand, in close collaborations with local Māori entities. A new project of hydrogen transportation from New Zealand to Fiji will start soon.

Sumitomo and Fuji Electric have been constructing geothermal power stations. I believe all those projects will have huge potential for our future business partnership based on sustainable development.

[People-to-people links]

Distinguished guests. I was with Minister Mahuta in Tokyo last week. Both ways in my trip, I found that all seats were full in the Air New Zealand flights between

Auckland and Tokyo. In Auckland Airport, I saw many Japanese teenagers full of smiles and hope for their new experiences and study. It was so fascinating. It is time to re-start and re-establish our people-to-people links. The Japanese Embassy has been working hard in this regard. Under the JET Programme, the Japanese government invites English speaking young people from all over the world to Japan for teaching English in cities and regions throughout the country. Under this programme, since 1987, every year around 100 New Zealanders have visited Japan and stayed for several years. That ends up as over 3,400 New Zealanders so far and we appreciate that many ex JETs are still actively engaged in people to people exchanges between our two countries. And New Zealand is a popular destination for young Japanese to study English language. Before the pandemic more than 10,000 Japanese students were staying in this country. As I saw in Auckland airport last week, they are now coming back to New Zealand. The 44 sister city relationships between our two countries, more than New Zealand has with any other country, have been re-activated. Christchurch and Kurashiki, the very first of its kind, celebrate the 50th anniversary this year. Also, the Hutt-Minoh Japanese cultural exchange festival is coming in November. And Wellington-Sakai relations were active on online basis even during the pandemic period. If you look at sports, our women's football national team "Nadeshiko Japan", the former world No.1, is looking forward to playing in New Zealand at the FIFA Women's World Cup.

[Ending]

Distinguished guests. The last three years have been tough for everyone. Social distancing, work from home, Zoom meetings, border restrictions, vaccine certificates, PCR, self-isolation were everywhere around the world. And very sadly the loss of many lives. We have worked so hard and have now come to the point where gatherings like this have become possible. Please take the opportunity tonight to socialise and sample the cuisine on offer.

Japanese food and drinks are widely accepted and popular here in New Zealand. That has been a pleasant surprise to me since my arrival in this country over two years ago. Sushi, Japanese food, sake and beer are prepared for you by local leading Japanese restaurants, importers and my Embassy's in-house chef. I hope all of you enjoy tonight.

E nga ri kua mutu nga Korero. No rei ra, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Now please join me in a toast to King Charles the third, wishing His Majesty, the Government and the people of New Zealand and everyone here tonight the very best for this year. Please follow me in saying Kanpai. Kanpai!