

**【Remarks by the Ambassador of Embassy of Japan at the Canterbury Earthquake Families Memorial Service on 22 Feb. 2025】**

I would like to respectfully offer my heartfelt words on the occasion of the Canterbury Earthquake Families Memorial Service.

First of all, I would like to deeply appreciate, Rod Thompson, the chair of the Quake Families Trust, and all of you, for organizing this commemorative event.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, 2011, the devastating earthquake that struck this region claimed 185 precious lives, including 28 irreplaceable individuals from Japan. 14 years have passed since, but no matter how many years may pass, my heart remains heavy with grief when thinking of those who lost their beloved family members, relatives, and friends.

Today, I extend my deepest condolences to all 185 victims, including those who now rest here at Avonhead. I also offer my sincere sympathies to their families. Additionally, I would

like to express my profound respect and gratitude to the volunteers from both Japan and New Zealand who have continued to support the bereaved families throughout these years.

The 28 Japanese victims came from diverse backgrounds. Some were students, others were nurses, journalists, or former teachers. Each of them had a dream—whether it was to learn English, work with people from around the world, foster international exchange, or contribute through volunteer work. Their aspirations were tragically cut short, and my heart aches as I think of them.

Just one month after the Canterbury Earthquake, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, Japan experienced an unprecedented disaster—the Great East Japan Earthquake. This catastrophe took the lives of 19,765 people, with 2,553 still missing. Entire communities were devastated.

Following the Canterbury Earthquake, Japan sent an international emergency response team to assist in New Zealand. In return, after the Great East Japan Earthquake, New Zealand dispatched its own emergency response team to Japan. To add, the Student Volunteer Army, which was formed in the wake of the Canterbury Earthquake, applied their experiences to help communities in Japan. Our two nations have stood together in times of hardship, supporting each other through the strongest of bonds.

It is our duty to ensure that the hard-earned lessons from these tragedies are never lost. We must work toward building disaster-resilient communities for future generations.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to Mayor Phill Mauger and his predecessors for their unwavering commitment to honoring the memory of the victims and supporting the bereaved families by organizing these memorial services every year.

As the Ambassador of Japan to New Zealand, I reaffirm my dedication to standing alongside the families of the victims and continuing to offer my sincere support.

With these thoughts, I conclude my words of remembrance, offering my heartfelt prayers for the peace and well-being of all the bereaved families.