

2025 Emperor's Birthday Reception: Remarks by Ambassador Osawa

(4 March 2025)

- Right Honourable Winston Peters, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister;
- Honourable Todd McClay, Minister for Trade and Investment;
- Honourable Simon Watts, Minister of Climate Change and Energy;
- Honourable Andrew Hoggard, Minister for Biosecurity;
- Mr Grahame Morton, the representative of the New Zealand Government for this reception and Deputy Secretary of the Americas and Asia Group;
- Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

Ladies and gentlemen, we are extremely delighted to celebrate the 65th birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan Naruhito, the symbol of the State and of the Unity of the People of Japan, together with our long-standing Pacific friend and an important partner, Aotearoa New Zealand. Thank you for joining us.

Ladies and gentlemen, since my arrival last March, our Strategic Cooperative Partnership has significantly strengthened.

There have been frequent leader-level exchanges. Last year, we welcomed three New Zealand Cabinet members to Japan. In June, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon held a Summit Meeting in Tokyo and achieved a successful outcome, including an agreement in principle on information security. On this same occasion, Trade Minister McClay also successfully led a trade delegation and strengthened our bilateral business ties. In July, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters attended the successful 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting, contributing to the stability and prosperity of the Region. In addition to bilateral visits, our leaders and ministers very frequently exchange views in various international gatherings.

Visits of Japanese Member of Parliament and executives have also revitalised. Last year, 5 MPs visited New Zealand and deepened their understanding of the New Zealand post system and agriculture. In November, the President of Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) visited Christchurch and Auckland for the first time.

Ladies and gentlemen, in fact, we had several “firsts” between our two countries in various cooperative fields.

- In defence relations, we can point out many examples of “firsts”, such as the first full-scale deployment of the P-8A Poseidon aircraft and the first bilateral training between the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force and the New Zealand Navy, on the occasion of the Navy vessel “Aotearoa”’s port call to Japan.
- Turning to our economic ties, the rich natural resources of Aotearoa have fascinated Japanese companies and encouraged new investment, such as the construction of the Tauhara power plant, the world’s largest geothermal power producer, and the hydrogen refuelling network. These “news” will further strengthen Japan’s economic position for New Zealand as an important trade and investment partner.

We need to look not only at what is new, but also at what is continuing.

- The Japan New Zealand Business Council Conference celebrated its 50th anniversary last November.
- Our 44 sister city relationships continue to thrive across the country.
- The Working Holiday Visa scheme celebrated its 40th anniversary, and more than 20,000 citizens used the scheme in the last decade.

Ladies and gentlemen, Japan and its culture continues to attract Kiwis. Last year, approximately 117,000 Kiwis visited Japan, which is 20% more than pre-COVID levels.

More than 18 thousand people gathered in one day at the Japan Festival held in Wellington last September. I'm also sure that Japanese "Anime and Manga" must be very popular in your family. But recently, there are even more reasons for Kiwis to be excited about Japan.

- Toyota's hydrogen technology is used in the chase boat for Team New Zealand that won the America's Cup.
- The All Blacks' training facility, NZCIS of Upper Hutt, is using a data control system from a Japanese company.
- 4 Japanese professional football players are playing in New Zealand teams, based in Wellington and Auckland.

And there is a good reason for more New Zealanders to visit Japan this year. In 40 days, Osaka World Expo will start. Let's visit Japan again!

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, this year marks the 80th year since the end of the Second World War and since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As the geopolitical situation in the world becomes increasingly severe, we have to reflect on our history and renew our commitment to peace.

To conclude, I would like to thank again everyone here. Today we offer you special Japanese cuisine, including *Hotate* scallop and *Hamachi* Yellowtail. Last December, the skills of *Sake*-making was recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. We have a special sake-tasting corner in the back, and I hope you will all enjoy it.

Thank you.

E nga ri kua mutu nga Korero.

No rei ra, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.