

Honourable Chris Penk, Minister of Defence  
Rear Admiral Mathew Williams, Vice Chief of Defence Force  
Rear Admiral Garin Golding, Chief of Navy  
Air Vice-Marshal Darryn Webb, Chief of Air Force  
Ms Sarah Minson, Deputy Secretary of Defence  
Members of Parliament and Diplomatic Corps

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

I am honoured to welcome you all aboard JS Kumano, a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force vessel, on the occasion of her visit to the port of Wellington.

Today, the world is experiencing great structural changes caused by power balance shifts and increasing conflicts and confrontations. A free and open international order based on the rule of law is under serious threat throughout the globe and our Indo-Pacific region is not an exception.

Japan and New Zealand are Strategic Cooperative Partners and neighbours across the Pacific, and we have been working together in realising a Free and Open Indo-Pacific in an increasingly severe and complex world where peace and stability cannot be taken for granted. It is against this backdrop that the Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi announced the updated vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific earlier this month, and it is so timely and symbolic that this port call by JS Kumano is taking place right afterwards.

This is the second consecutive year that a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force vessel has made a port call in Wellington, following those by JS Ise and JS Suzunami in August last year. This is not a coincidence, but rather, a reflection of the long-term trajectory of increasing defence cooperation between our two countries. Recently, we have concluded a few legal frameworks, such as the Information Security Agreement and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, or ACSA. We deeply appreciate the monitoring and surveillance activities by the Royal New Zealand Navy and Air Force in support of the enforcement of UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea in our neighbourhood. We also have engaged in a number of bilateral and multilateral exercises together, most recently, Balikatan in the Philippines.

In today's world, no one country can safeguard its own peace and stability by itself, let alone that of the region as a whole. Reliable partners are indispensable. Last

month, Japan revised its defence equipment and technology transfer regime in order to respond to demands from our partners for Japanese-made equipment. Our aim is to better contribute to preventing conflicts and ensuring the peace and stability of the world during these uncertain times. In this context, New Zealand's decision on 7 May to focus on considering the Mogami-class frigate as one of the options for potential replacement of the ANZAC-class frigates is a welcome sign.

As New Zealand's only official ally as well as one of Japan's closest security partners, Australia plays a key role in safeguarding both our shared interests. To maintain peace and stability in this region, enhanced coordination among Japan, New Zealand and Australia and increased interoperability for that purpose is crucial. I sincerely hope that Japan's new defence equipment transfer system will help accelerate such tripartite cooperation. JS Kumano, which has sailed via Australia to New Zealand, symbolises our shared path towards an enhanced Japan-New Zealand relationship.

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