

(Final)

**Speech by Consul General Matsui
on the occasion of the Reception to Celebrate
His Majesty the Emperor of Japan's Birthday**

February 9, 2024

Tēnā koutou katoa. Kia Ora,こんばんは、皆様ようこそお越しくございました。Good evening, everyone, I thank you for coming to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito, the 126th Emperor of Japan, who will turn 64 on the 23rd of February.

Now I am so delighted to see the familiar faces, and new friends and colleagues here, 8 months after I took my position as a first timer in Aotearoa New Zealand. Tonight, it is truly my special honour to be joined by:

- The Honourable Brooke van Velden, Minister of Internal Affairs, and, Workplace Relations and Safety, Member of Parliament for Tamaki,
- The Honourable Jenny Salesa, Member of Parliament for Panmure-Otahuhu,
- His Worship the Mayor of Auckland Wayne Brown,
- Her Worship the Mayor of Hamilton Paula Southgate,
- Auckland Councillors Mr Chris Darby Ms Lotu Fuli, , Mr Shane Henderson, Ms Kerrin Leoni, Mr Wayne Walker, and Mr John Watson,
- Distinguished members of the Consular Corps in Auckland,
- The Honourable Simon Bridges, Auckland Business Chamber CEO, and
- All distinguished guests.

At the outset, let us take time to remember the souls of those who lost their lives and renew my heartfelt sympathy to all those affected by the Noto Peninsula Earthquake. This earthquake caused great damage at the beginning of this year, for which Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress sent message and donation to the affected areas. I thank all the countries, regions, organizations and individuals who offered assistance, provided donations, otherwise staying with our hearts. My office is also reminded that we all should be prepared and further resilience is imperative on earth. This is part of our new year's resolution.

Before I talk, looking forward, let me look back on our own history. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the first Consul General of Auckland, Mr KAMOHARA, who assumed his post in 1974. The construction works undertaken by Japanese companies and completed back in 1969 to double the capacity of the Auckland Harbour Bridge in fact triggered the opening of this Consulate-General in Auckland in 1971. I will not forget the foundation and aspirations of the bridge between our two countries that has been built by our predecessors.

Coming a long way, there are currently more than 10,000 Japanese residents in Auckland, Northland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty and Ruapehu areas, which are our office jurisdiction. We now have

155 Japanese company offices in this area and Japanese businesses are growing steadily.

Now, I will skip to mention the long list of the progress made in our activities and Japan-NZ diplomatic, economic and cultural relations. Instead, I would like to walk you through this short way.

Tonight, you can get a real sense of some leading examples of what Japanese companies are providing you here, such as future hydrogen technology used in Toyota Mirai displayed there and more. So please enjoy meeting the Japanese business and new people. The Consulate-General will continue to support and facilitate the interaction. Nisui-kai President Mr. EGAWA and Auckland Business Council CEO Simon Bridges, thank you for being with us together.

As to the reviving sister city exchange, we thank you His Worship the Mayor Brown, deputy Mayor and the councillors concerned for supporting and renewing the longstanding sister city relationship with Tokyo Shinagawa, Fukuoka City and more, including the resumed school visit last year. I also have special thanks to Her Worship the Mayor Southgate for joining our cheers to Nadeshiko Japan's all-out play together in Hamilton.

On the vibrant cultural exchange, our special thanks go to the Nippon Budokan (Martial Arts Hall) which hosted a martial arts cultural exchange program between Tokyo and Auckland and impressed each other for their future. Now, distinguish guests, you are now surrounded by some Japanese artists and Japanese cultural presentations today. Those include Ikebana arranged by Sogetsu's Auckland Branch master, Japanese tee experience available with our tee ambassador, and Japanese sake tasting and more just behind you.

Looking ahead, there are more events to come. We continue to host Japanese Film evenings in town, and Japan Day 2024, the cultural festival you are aware of organized by the Japanese Society of Auckland is happening on Sunday 25th February. President Ms. KURODA, thank you for being with us, so check it out, everyone.

Turning our attention to the international community, we are facing major challenges such as the situation in Israel and Gaza, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. It is important more than ever for Aotearoa New Zealand and Japan to strengthen our relationship as Strategic Cooperative Partners in the Indo-Pacific region for peace and security. Japan will also work closely with PALM 10 Pacific Islanders including NZ to address the common challenges and shape the future we want.

To conclude my speech, I would like to say how much I appreciate all my new colleagues and friends who helped me host and enjoy this occasion together and thank my wife for supporting me through 34 years diplomatic career, rain, snow or shine in Tokyo or overseas sharing my samurai spirit and belief in good hearts and minds.

Now, please have your glass of drink ready. Let me propose a toast to His Majesty, the King and the people of Aotearoa New Zealand and Japan, with our best wishes, "KANPAI!"