

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

February 21, 2025

1. Introduction

Tēnā koutou katoa. Nau mai haere mai, ki toku Kainga. こんばんは、皆様ようこそ総領事公邸にお越しくださいました。Good evening, everyone, welcome to our home, precisely our government-owned residence.

At the outset, I am very pleased to acknowledge:

The Honourable Brooke van Velden, Minister of Internal Affairs, and, Workplace Relations and Safety, Member of Parliament for Tamaki,
His Worship the Mayor of Auckland Wayne Brown,
Her Worship the Mayor of Hamilton Paula Southgate,
His Worship the Mayor of Whangārei Vince Cocurullo,
Member of Parliament the Honourable Melissa Lee,
Auckland Councillors Mr John Watson, Mr Wayne Walker and Mr Shane Henderson,
Members of Local Boards,
Distinguished members of the Auckland Consular Corps, and
Distinguished guests.

It is my special honour and pleasure to welcome you all to this reception to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito, the 126th Emperor of Japan, who will actually turn 65 years old on the 23rd of February. I thank you all for joining us.

2. Overview of year 2024

New Zealand Prime Minister Luxon's first visit to Japan last June marked a major milestone in our "strategic cooperative partnership". Japan's Prime Minister ISHIBA had the pleasure of meeting Prime Minister Luxon during his visit to Laos last October, and the two leaders concurred to further strengthen bilateral cooperation to realise a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)". Japan has steadily, sincerely and strenuously continued to conduct peace diplomacy for the past 80 years, and this is also the cornerstone and trajectory of the friendship between Japan and New Zealand. In today's international society, where divisions and confrontation on the rise and the war, it is extremely important for us to work together in our tireless efforts for the just and lasting peace and sustainable prosperity of the region through dialogue and cooperation.

On the economic front, we witnessed new business developments despite the very challenging economic conditions throughout 2024, such as the opening of hydrogen refuelling stations in Auckland and industry-academia collaboration on geothermal energy as well as the opening of Tauhara

geothermal power station in Taupo region. Energy was high on the business agenda, driven by shared visions for producing renewable energy and reducing carbon emissions. Proudly to note, those efforts have been made through the reliable and resilient partnerships of Japanese and kiwi companies building on close bonds with the local Maori communities.

Yesterday I attended the opening of new LEXUS dealer branch in Botany, celebrated by Prime Minister Luxon. These are some examples of Japan's impactful investments in New Zealand. Today we have a number of exhibitions of products, services and new technologies by Japanese companies, from different sectors, all focusing on sustainability. So, please have a look and enjoy your networking. Mr. Jasson Brown, representing the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Auckland and Mr Matsudo, head of the Japanese Business Club, are with us. Thank you for your attendance.

Regarding people to people exchange, I would also like to highlight a few points. First of all, football or soccer. We are very happy that Mr SAKAI Hiroki, joined the new team Auckland FC as captain last year, together with Mr TAKAHASHI Hideto, the academy coach of Auckland United F.C. We are looking forward to cheering them on at the stadium. Captain Sakai, winning great so far, thank you for being with us, all the best for tomorrow's game!

In addition, we proudly acknowledge that there were many developments for Japanese martial arts. Beginning with the 50th anniversary celebration of Shorinji Kempo in New Zealand, there were tournaments and seminars for Judo, Aikido, Kendo, Iaido, Karatedo and other martial arts, mostly traced back to over 50 years' practices in New Zealand. I also thank the team of AUT for connecting Japanese and kiwi alumni at AUT last November, for their career and our common future.

As for academic cooperation, the East Asia International Conference was hosted by the New Zealand Asia Institute's Japan Studies Centre at the University of Auckland with the theme of "Ensuring Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth in East Asia" last November. In April I had the pleasure of hosting the investiture ceremony for Dr Wayne Lawrence, recipient of the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette for his merit in contributing to promoting academic exchanges and mutual understanding between Japan and New Zealand based on his outstanding achievement in the Japanese linguistic studies, so we are certain our language also matters for the current and future academic diversity in New Zealand.

At the same time, caring and meaningful connection in the community is becoming a common concern in the local communities. The board members of the Japanese Society of Auckland are with us today. I believe the benefit of business, cultural, sports and educational exchanges must go to our children, our future in the end.

3. Sister City Exchange

In October, Hamilton and Saitama City celebrated their 40th anniversary of the sister city relationship thanks to the excellent host by Mayor Southgate. In November, Mayor Brown visited Japan and exchanged opinions with Tokyo Metropolitan Government officials and the Mayor of Shinagawa City in Tokyo. Tonight, we have an exhibition from Fukuoka City, that enjoys 39 years of

the sister city relationship with Auckland. We also received other local delegations from Japan.

As I enter my second year as Consul General in Auckland, I have had the pleasure of travelling to places such as Tauranga, Whangarei, Hamilton, and Taupo to deepen my understanding and connection of the region. I was so encouraged by potential for our further support or collaboration. There are so many places for me and wife to love in New Zealand, and Fukuoka Friendship Garden is just one of those. This is the treasure kept by the two cities with grateful volunteers.

4. SAKE as the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

I see you have all picked up a MASU, wooden box at the entrance. You may have already poured SAKE into the MASU. This is the most important news of the day! Last December, the "Traditional Knowledge and Skills of SAKE - Making with KOJI Mould in Japan" was inscribed on UNESCO's "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". It includes NIHON-SHU, SHOCHU or AWAMORI etc. and tonight we would like you to taste them. Please enjoy the harmony of drink and food. I would like to thank Japan External Trade Organization or JETRO, and collaborating companies: Tokyo Food, Japan Food Corp and Kiwi Success for their support in making this possible.

5. Conclusion

Before I conclude, I thank all my staff, including my chef and Japanese tea ambassador here with us, and professional collaborators for making this all happen today. Let me forget, thank my wife for hosting this celebration together and creating this stunning ikebana in cooperation with Sogetsu Auckland Branch.

Now, please have your glasses or MASU ready. Let me propose a toast to His Majesty the King and the peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand and Japan, with our best wishes, "Kanpai"!