

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

February 20, 2026

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ございました。

Good evening, everyone, welcome to our 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

Deputy Mayor Desley Simpson,

Member of Parliament for Panmure-Otahuhu, the Honorable Jenny Salesa,

Auckland Councillors Ms Victoria Short, Mr Matt Winiata, Ms Josephine Bartley, Mr Shane Henderson, Mr Ken Turner, and Mr John Watson,

Members of Local Boards,

Distinguished members of the Auckland Consular Corps, and

Distinguished guests,

It is a great honour to welcome you all to this reception tonight. We are delighted to celebrate together the birthday of His Majesty, Emperor Naruhito, the 126th Emperor of Japan, who will celebrate his 66th birthday on February 23rd.

We also warmly welcome Maori leaders including Ms. Rukumoana Schaafhausen, present on behalf of the Māori Queen Te Arikinui Kuini Nga wai hono i te pō. I am deeply grateful for your presence, recalling our growing friendship and bond with tangata whenua. Thank you all for joining us and making this occasion so special.

2. Overview of cooperation in international arena

Reflecting on the past year, it is particularly noteworthy that Japan and New Zealand have significantly strengthened their cooperation in promoting a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), amidst the increasingly severe security environment in the region.

Specifically, building upon our Strategic Cooperative Partnership, we signed a pivotal Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) and an Information Security Agreement last December. This represents a significant achievement in enhancing our bilateral defence and security cooperation, and we are proud to acknowledge this milestone.

Furthermore, Japan and New Zealand's contributions are increasingly vital to the international

economy. Our two nations have concurred on the necessity of strengthening multi-layered cooperation with allies and like-minded countries. A prime example of this is our joint commitment to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Last year, Ministers and Representatives of the CPTPP Parties engaged in significant dialogues with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union. Through these discussions, we reached a shared understanding emphasizing two key principles:

- ✧ Free, fair and open markets and rules-based trade have contributed to our prosperity and remain essential to our future economic growth and security
- ✧ We will continue to uphold and implement commitments under existing multilateral, regional and bilateral trade agreements, including with regard to the settlement of any trade disputes¹.

3. Overview of bilateral cooperation

□ Reflecting over the past year until now, it was my distinct pleasure to attend a vibrant competition and demonstration showcasing Japanese martial arts, including Karate-do, Judo, and Aikido in Auckland. We also organised events such as the Japanese Film Festival, the Sogetsu Ikebana and a Japanese Tea Workshop with a unique high tea provided by our official Chef Kitazono, and live music performances, all of which connected our guests unquestionably in peace and harmony.

This year has already begun with exciting cultural engagements. We recently enjoyed the Kids Japanese Festival at the end of January, which served as a wonderful kick-off to our annual events. Now please anticipate Japan Day, just two days away, where we will once again celebrate Japanese culture and food under the delightful slogan, "Oishii" organised mainly by the Japanese Society of Auckland with no entry fee.

From an economic perspective, Japan stands as a crucial partner for New Zealand, currently serving as its fifth largest export destination and the fourth largest source of foreign direct investment. Last year, I attended the 51st Japan-New Zealand Business Conference (JNZBC) in Rotorua, where they engaged in productive discussions on key areas such as "Innovation," "Startups," "Renewable Energy," and "Infrastructure Investment." Tonight, we are pleased to feature a display of Toyota's Mirai hydrogen fuel cell vehicle. Also, we have a dedicated stand showcasing the Obayashi Green Hydrogen Project. So, let's have a look at these exhibits to learn more about cutting-edge sustainable technologies.

Building on these discussions, we are committed to strengthening our economic ties. To this end, we will be hosting a Japan Seminar in March designed to boost trade and investment into Japan and New Zealand, fostering greater synergies among economic organizations from both countries.

3. Sister City Exchange

¹ <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/tpp/tppinfo/2025/index.html#kakuryo20251121>

I am delighted to highlight that exchanges between Auckland and cities across Japan have not only fully resumed but are flourishing at 100% of their pre-COVID intensity.

Last October, we were honored to host a delegation from the Fukuoka City Council in Auckland. I extend my sincere thanks to Deputy Mayor Simpson for her gracious welcome. This year marks a particularly special milestone: the 40th anniversary of the sister city relationship between Auckland and Fukuoka. The Fukuoka Friendship Garden continues to stand as a quiet yet powerful symbol of this enduring connection, lovingly maintained by dedicated volunteers and cherished by both cities as a beacon of unity and friendship. I encourage you all to visit the Fukuoka City promotion stand available tonight, where you can learn more about this vibrant city in Kyushu.

Already this year, we have welcomed two significant delegations: one from the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly, and another from the Utsunomiya City Council. Both delegations shared with me common challenges that many cities face, such as sustainable tourism and waste management, underscoring the vital importance of learning from each other's experiences.

Crucially, these valuable exchanges extend beyond governmental levels, actively involving younger generations at the community level. During July and August last year, students from Shinagawa City, Kakogawa City, Himeji City, Nishinomiya City, and more visited Auckland as part of their study programs. We remain committed to promoting Japan-New Zealand people-to-people exchanges and their life journey beyond. I am sure our bond in mutual trust and respect has been, and will be, further strengthened 15 years after the great earthquakes in both countries and subsequent mutual emergency support.

5. Conclusion

Tonight, we are also delighted to feature a special exhibition stand, in collaboration with Tokyo Food and Japan Food Corp. We are especially pleased to have Japanese Sake producers present with us, eager to share their craft. Additionally, we invite you to sample Japanese Hyoketsu, a popular RTD (Ready to Drink) beverage in Japan, brought to you by Lion. We also hope you will enjoy the captivating sushi demonstration and a variety of other exquisite Japanese gourmet offerings available throughout the reception.

Before I conclude my remarks, I wish to proudly extend my gratitude to our entire staff for their tireless efforts and attentive planning to make this reception possible. Last but certainly not least, I must express my profound appreciation to my dear wife for co-hosting this wonderful celebration.