

Building Together for a Better Future

Address by His Excellency Kaoru Ishikawa to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

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Toronto ON

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I. Introduction

Mr. Speaker;
Honourable Premier;
Distinguished leaders of the opposition parties;
Elected members of the Ontario Provincial Parliament;
Ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to thank you most sincerely for giving me the great honour and privilege to speak to you in this magnificent symbol of democracy – the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

There truly is no place like Ontario, with its beautiful parks and bustling cities, it comes as no surprise that their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan were enchanted by the warmth and hospitality of Ontarians and Canadians during their visit in the summer of 2009.

Ontario also has a very special place in my heart as I think back to the wonderful summer of 1968 when I visited this very city, Toronto. During that time, my father had the privilege of serving as the Consul-General of Japan, and he always had very fond memories of this beautiful province.

Today, I am tremendously fortunate to return as Ambassador of Japan, and I would like to share with you the latest developments occurring in my country, as well as my hope for the future of Japan-Canada and Japan-Ontario relations.

Today, my country faces its largest challenge in modern history. Over four weeks ago, a powerful earthquake and tsunami led to an unimaginable toll of death and destruction.

Before I address the details of this disaster, allow me to offer my deep gratitude to all Canadians and Ontarians who have given us heart-warming messages of sympathy and condolence. From His Excellency the Right Honourable Governor General David Johnston, the Right Honourable Prime Minister Stephen Harper, His Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor David Onley, the Honourable Premier Dalton McGuinty and the Honourable Speaker Mr. Steve Peters to the countless number of residents from across Canada and Ontario, I want to take this moment to say “thank you.” I also would like to mention that I had the privilege of meeting with the Honourable Premier after the disaster took place, and his words were very moving.

Indeed, the words, thoughts, and prayers of all Canadians have not gone unnoticed. They have created hope and strength to the people of Japan as they rebuild and move forward. For the second time since the end of the Second World War, His Majesty the Emperor of Japan addressed his people in a televised speech, offering encouragement and hope, as well as expressing his deep gratitude to the assistance provided by friends and allies, including Canada.

II. The Disaster

On March 11th, Japan was struck by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake, the highest ever observed in my country. A tectonic plate shift of 500 km long and 200 km wide led to powerful and violent tsunamis which created waves as high as 40 meters; their effects further amplified by a saw-tooth coastline adjacent to steep mountains with countless villages and municipal offices. We swallow with difficulty the fact that these villages and offices no longer exist. This has made it extremely challenging to assess the damage and to receive and host rescue and assistance teams from our friends and allies.

With many of the roads, bridges, railroads, and seaports no longer functioning, a US Navy Aircraft Carrier was deployed almost immediately after the disaster. This carrier has served as a base for Japan's Self-Defense Forces and emergency response helicopters as they continue to search and rescue residents in the affected areas.

In addition to the countless lives lost, and the many more who have no shelter, the disaster has also had an impact on the Fukushima nuclear power plants. While the reactors automatically shut down after the earthquake, the more than-14-meter high waves of the tsunami virtually destroyed the reactors' cooling systems, a critical aspect of nuclear safety.

Today, we are still struggling to cool down the reactors. It seems as though every time we make progress and take two steps forward, we face yet another unpredictable challenge and take one step back. Nevertheless, the government – with the assistance of nuclear energy experts both within and outside Japan – is continuing to make utmost efforts to resolve this situation. With this challenge, we have seen the incredible bravery and resolve of the “Fukushima 50,” an initial group of 50 that has now grown to more than 450 engineers and technicians who have courageously stayed behind to stabilize the reactors and assess the damage and radiation levels at the plant.

The situation concerning the Fukushima reactors have led to many discussions with regards to nuclear energy. Although our priority at this time is to address the situation, undoubtedly our government – and presumably the global community-at-large – will need to examine the lessons learned from this situation and advance towards more robust nuclear safety. During his visit to Japan on March 31, His Excellency Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, the President of France and the Chair of this year's G8 and G20, acknowledged a need for further discussions on this matter during a bilateral meeting with Japan's Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Naoto Kan.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and appreciate the offers of assistance by the Government of Canada. In fact, 25,000 Canadian thermal blankets have been sent to Japan and are now being delivered to evacuees. These blankets will prove to be invaluable

to the displaced victims of the affected region where the winter is as cold as yours. Furthermore, we have just received radiation survey meters and dosimeters from Canada to assist with our nuclear emergency response efforts in Fukushima.

Canadians – among them many Ontarians – have also given generously through the Canadian Red Cross. Many cities are hosting fundraisers and awareness events. Corporations and organizations have also donated significantly to the relief efforts. And members of the media have worked tremendously hard to relay the latest news of the disaster – and this has been invaluable to the many Japanese residents in Canada, and to Canadians who have family and friends residing in Japan.

The small and large acts of all Canadians – spanning all generations – are extraordinary. One notable example is of an 8-year-old boy from Halifax, whose father drove him all the way to Ottawa so that he could personally deliver one-thousand four-hundred paper cranes which he folded with his classmates. Each paper crane had a special message to the people of Japan, and the boy's own message contained his wish for [quote] the people of Japan to not lose hope and that they know that we care. [end quote] Traditionally, groupings of a thousand paper cranes serve as a symbol of prayer and encouragement to the Japanese people, but in this particular case, they had indeed a much deeper and profound meaning.

III. Japan and Ontario: Economic relations

The reaction of Canada and Ontario to the situation in Japan may come as no surprise to some, as our two countries share a rich history of partnership and cooperation. I would like to touch briefly on this relationship – first, from an economic perspective.

Many of you may have heard the term “lost decade,” used to describe the economic downturn that Japan faced during the 1990s. While there are still many economic and social issues that need to be addressed domestically, I want to shed some light on the positive aspects of this decade.

While indeed, heavy and bulk industries lost their competitive edge during this time, many new industries were born in Japan and grew very rapidly during this period – most notably, mobile telecommunications grew 60% per year, the development of liquid crystal display 35%, fibre-optics 20%, personal computers 18%, and the list goes on.

When we look even closer at individual companies, we are able to see innovation in action during this lost decade. For example, we observed a resurrection of light industry companies such as textile makers who transformed themselves to become high-tech companies.

All of this to say that the term “lost decade” is irrelevant when it comes to the economic relationship between Japan and Ontario.

Most notably, Japanese automakers such as Toyota and Honda have made investments in Ontario. They produce over 740,000 cars yearly which in turn has created 65,000 jobs in this province. In fact, the total export value of these vehicles manufactured in Canada amounts to more than 12 billion dollars annually.

Furthermore, over two hundred forty Japanese companies have chosen to invest in Ontario, thanks to the longstanding support of the Government of Ontario for this type of investment.

This province is also home to many technological breakthroughs and innovative products. I myself use a BlackBerry, one of the best products in the world created right here in Ontario. It is interesting to note that, within the BlackBerry, we can see our economic partnership at work, with Japanese companies such as Sanyo and Anritsu supplying critical components to the production of this device.

While there are worries that the supply of some Japanese-made components will be affected by the recent disaster, I am pleased to share with you that many factories have restarted their production lines, according to the Japan Auto Parts Industries Association.

Indeed, we – 120 million Japanese citizens – firmly believe that the only way to overcome this challenge is to conduct our task at hand with the best of our abilities with no sensation or panic, but with steady and firm determination, conviction, and hope.

Speaking of hope, we know that science and technology are the only ways for our country to move forward, and there are many examples of scientific and technological collaboration between Japan and Ontario. If I can cite a few examples:

The University of Toronto's Institute for Biomaterials and Biomedical Engineering and Kyoto University's Centre for iPS Cell Research and Application have worked together to make progress on stem-cell research; and

The National Institute of Materials Science of Japan and Waterloo University have been promoting their collaboration on nanotechnology since the signing of a partnership agreement in February of 2010.

I am also very proud to note that eight Japanese scientists have had the honour of being awarded the Gairdner Award. Recently, on March 23rd, it was announced that Dr. Shizuo Akira of Osaka University would be one of seven recipients for 2011.

On a broader scale, allow me to touch briefly on the partnership between Japan and Canada. One such example of this partnership took place very recently on January 27, 2011, when a Japanese-built unmanned cargo spacecraft successfully docked with the International Space Station with the assistance of the Canadian-built CANADARM 2 in space. Many of you may have seen this spectacular occurrence broadcast on CBC television.

This event is simply one of many which symbolize the potential of our economic and technological partnership. In February of this year, both Japan and Canada agreed to launch a Joint Study on an Economic Partnership Agreement. Both parties held their first meeting for this study in March, and a second meeting is scheduled to take place next week.

Japan and Canada will also launch its first Sub Cabinet-Level Dialogue on Political, Peace, and Security Cooperation in August. Both initiatives will be invaluable pillars in mobilizing our bilateral relations to the next phase of collaboration.

As Ambassador, I am very proud to see our country advance with Canada on these fronts, promoting free trade in accordance with the World Trade Organization and establishing a prime example of two free market and open economies and societies working hand-in-hand. My humble belief is that this is made possible by the fact that both countries have a long history of participatory democracy, freedom of speech and expression, and legal predictability; the latter which I believe is a crucial element for the success of our multi-faceted relationship.

Mr. Speaker:

Allow me to reassure all members of this Legislative Assembly that I will spare no efforts to ensure the success of this collaboration between Japan and Canada, and needless to mention, Japan and Ontario.

IV. Japan and Ontario: Cultural relations

In addition to our economic partnership, I believe it is very important to note the cultural exchange that occurs between our two countries.

Most notably, there has been an increase in the number of Japanese students who come to Canada. In fact, 220 Academic Cooperation Agreements between Japanese and Canadian universities are actively engaged.

Over 7,000 Canadians have also participated in the JET Programme – a Japanese government initiative aimed at creating grassroots exchanges and relationships between Japan and Canada – mainly inviting them as English teachers and dispatching them to various towns and villages throughout Japan.

Toronto is home to the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. Led by President Mr. Gary Kawaguchi and Executive Director Mr. James Heron, the Centre is an incredible symbol of multiculturalism and highlights the role of Japanese-Canadians in this country. It serves as a gathering place for not only Japanese-Canadians, but also many other ethnic communities as they seek to explore the roots of their cultures.

On April 9, the Centre will host the Third Annual Sakura Ball, a highlight of which is the Sakura Award, recognizing exceptional contributions made by individuals to the promotion and exchange of Japanese culture and enhancing awareness of Japanese heritage within Canada and abroad. The recipient of this year's Award is Dr. David Suzuki.

V. Conclusion

Mr. Speaker;

Elected representatives of the people of Ontario:

The recent earthquake and tsunami have shown all of us the incredible power of Mother Nature. More importantly, it has taught us the need to seek a balance between nature and mankind.

As Ambassador, I am confident that the people of my country will move forward, recover from this hardship, and rebuild once again to become the vibrant economic and cultural centre of Asia. However, as we rebuild, we must never forget the most vulnerable generation affected by this tragic disaster. For the children who have lost their homes – and in many cases, those who have lost their parents – it is my personal appeal for our government and all of our friends and neighbours to offer them support and, like the message written by the boy from Halifax, let them know that they are not alone.

Mr. Speaker,

Please allow me to say once again – “thank you.” The support, generosity, and solidarity of the members of this Legislative Assembly, all Ontarians, and all Canadians will never be forgotten.

Thank you.