

**Ambassador Okuda's remarks at the Arrival Reception on June 12<sup>th</sup>**

Honored Guests:

Bonsoir.

C'est un grand honneur pour moi de vous accueillir ce soir à ma résidence.

As Japan's new Ambassador to Canada, I am happy for the opportunity to meet and spend some time with new friends and colleagues that I will be working so closely with over the coming years.

As some of you may know, my previous posting was in Egypt. Keiko and I spent an exciting couple of years in the land of the Pharaohs, but we were very happy to learn that we would be coming to Ottawa. Adjusting to the change, however, will take some time. We consider ourselves very fortunate to be arriving at this time of year. A January arrival might have required more adjustment than we could comfortably handle.

Although this is my first posting to Canada, I had the opportunity over two decades ago to experience the majesty of the Canadian Rocky Mountains as a tourist. It was an experience I will never forget. During my tenure as Ambassador, I hope to travel to all corners of this vast and beautiful country. I look forward to experiencing its diversity and getting to know its people.

I feel fortunate to be taking up my duties here at such an exciting juncture in the history of Japan-Canada bilateral relations. Negotiations toward an Economic Partnership Agreement are well underway and are taking place at the same time that momentum toward general economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region continues to build.

While an EPA represents an exciting step forward in Canada-Japan economic relations, tremendous opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships in a wide range of sectors already exist. One of many examples which stand out is the potential to export Canadian liquid natural gas to Japan. Canada has an abundant supply of this commodity which it is looking to sell. Japan needs to enhance its supply of stable and affordable energy. The Japanese government is offering incentives to Japanese companies willing to invest in infrastructure to expedite shipments to Japan from Canada's West Coast.

The Canada-Japan relationship is, however, about much more than economics. It is a mature, multi-dimensional partnership that has been shaped by shared values such as democracy, the protection of personal freedoms, respect for human rights, and adherence to the rule of law. More and more often our two countries find themselves lining up on the same side of important political issues. We have become familiar and comfortable international partners.

At the grassroots level, an increase in people-to-people exchanges in recent years has led to a deeper mutual understanding of each other. It will be a priority of mine while I am in Canada to encourage the growth of these exchanges and to do whatever I can to bring our two peoples closer together.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would just like to mention that HH Princess Takamado will be visiting Ottawa, Victoria, and Vancouver as a guest of the Government of Canada between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of this month. The Princess and her late husband Prince Takamado travelled to Canada on numerous occasions lending their support to many Canadian causes. In fact, their relationship to this country was so close that the Prince often affectionately called Canada his second homeland. I am confident that, with the support of the Canadian government and the Canadian people, this upcoming visit will serve to strengthen the bond between our two countries.

Once again, Keiko and I would like to thank you all for joining us here this evening. Please enjoy yourselves.

Je vous remercie infiniment.