

Remarks for H.E. Norihiro Okuda
National Day Reception
Westin Hotel, Ottawa
November 27, 2014

The Honourable Ed Fast,

Your Excellencies,

Members of the diplomatic community,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen:

It is my very great pleasure to welcome you all here this evening.

Today, we are hosting this reception to mark and celebrate the occasion of the 81st birthday of His Majesty Emperor Akihito. His Majesty remains a symbol of the unity of the Japanese people and, together with Her Majesty Michiko, who turned 80 years old last month, he works tirelessly on their behalf.

His Majesty is well known in Japan to always pray for peace, safety and prosperity of people both inside and outside Japan. Quite often His Majesty, together with Her Majesty the Empress, still goes out of the capital to talk to and cheer up those people who suffered from natural disasters or illnesses. Japan is prone to various natural disasters as shown by the recent earthquake with the magnitude 6.7 causing huge damages to Nagano prefecture this month. Therefore, I'm afraid his job may not find its end easily.

In fact, His Majesty will turn 81 years old on December 23rd. Since his birthday falls so close to Christmas, and taking into account the very busy schedules of the members of international community at that time of year, we usually hold this reception one month earlier. I would like to express my gratitude to all of you for coming out this evening, and I ask you to join me in wishing Their Majesties' continued health and prosperity.

The year 2014 had been another memorable year for Canada-Japan relationship, one that is built on shared values and ideals that make us natural friends and allies. Our two Prime Ministers enjoyed a short encounter on the sidelines of APEC Summit in Beijing and could confirm the strong friendship in the wake of last year's Summit talks in Ottawa.

This year Minister Baird visited Japan in July. He and our Foreign Minister Mr. Kishida discussed a wide range of initiatives including regional peace and security, cooperation in the energy sector, and the negotiations on economic partnership agreement. I was very pleased that he visited Japan, because the visit gave me a chance to go back to Tokyo on the government account. I'm very grateful to Foreign Minister Baird for another reason. During the luncheon our Foreign Minister hosted for him, he was so nice as to say he liked sushi presented by the chef of the Japanese Ambassador. I'm not saying that the sushi in this reception is better than those presented by my Foreign Minister's chef. That would be too much. I wouldn't dare. I just feel honoured that Japanese foods are increasingly appreciated by Canadians and that businesses of Japanese restaurants are flourishing in Canada

Minister Fast's visit to Japan earlier this month also highlighted our business community ties in the field of aerospace, retail and IT. The new investment this year from

Japan to Canada includes “Muji”, a Japanese stylistic housewares and lifestyle retailer which is going to open its first flagship store in Toronto in two days (on 29th November), and “Gumi”, a mobile game company which has opened its new office in Vancouver, where it is becoming a hub for Japanese gaming industry. And just to add, Blue-Jays Kitty has debuted this summer, helping the team attract younger generation fans to the sport, which also has a strong following in Japan.

On another note about sports, Japan will be competing in the FIFA female world cup next year, with fans from all over Japan visiting Canada. It is my pleasure to note that many of the visiting fans will be using the new convenient airline services from Tokyo downtown airport Haneda which commenced this year. We also hope, as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics approach, that many more Canadians will visit Japan and feel the cultural heritage and the treasured nature of Japan.

As you have seen in some of the examples that I have mentioned, we are constantly upgrading our exciting era of Japan/Canada relations. I am delighted to lead this process, and I look forward to working with many of you going forward.

Now, I would now like to invite the Honourable Ed Fast, Minister of International Trade to make a few remarks.

Please enjoy the evening.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup.