

Akemashite omedetou gozaimasu. Happy New Year! Bonne année!

I would like to welcome you all this evening as we ring in the New Year together. It is always wonderful to get together to wish each other health, joy, and prosperity for the year to come.

This is my first New Year and winter in Canada, as I arrived in Ottawa in April last year. During past nine months I have had the opportunity to visit many places in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta, and I was every time impressed with the beauty, wealth and diversity of this country. This year I will certainly visit many other places in this vast country.

One of the biggest events since my arrival was the change of power to the Liberal Government under the Prime Minister Trudeau. And I had the privilege to be present at the first official meeting between Mr. Trudeau and Prime Minister Abe last November on the margins of the APEC Leaders' Summit in Manila, which provided a fresh impetus to our already excellent bilateral relations. In 2016, I would like to follow up the broad agreement between our leaders to further promote Japan-Canada relations in various areas including economy, international security, science and technology, culture, and others.

This year Japan will be hosting the Ise-Shima G7 Summit in Mie Prefecture in central Japan in May as well as nine G7 Ministerial meetings on a wide range of issues. The objective of G7 is to ensure the security and prosperity of the international community. At the same time it will be an excellent opportunity to further promote Japan-Canada relations with the visits to Japan of so many important figures from Canada starting from Prime Minister and Mrs. Trudeau, and maybe their children, too.

Last month I had the honor to attend the Mochitsuki Taikai in Ottawa, where I have met many Japanese Canadians and Japanese nationals as well as many Canadians who are great fans of Japan. I would like to highly commend the works of OJCA and OJCC for creating a vibrant platform for the people to come together, and also for helping Canadians and Japanese to learn more about each other.

I look forward to working with you in the year ahead as we strive to further the mutual understanding between our two countries.

I would like to conclude my remarks by proposing a toast to the health and continued success of everyone in 2016. Kanpai!