

Address by Minister Dion at a reception and birthday celebration
honouring His Majesty the Emperor of Japan

November 23, 2016 - Ottawa, Ontario

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Konbanwa [Good evening]! What an incredible honour to be here tonight as we celebrate His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

On behalf of Prime Minister [Justin] Trudeau, the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I pass along our best wishes for a very happy birthday: O'tanjoubi omedetou gozaimasu [We wish you a happy birthday].

I must also take this opportunity to extend my most sincere condolences on behalf of all Canadians for the recent passing of His Imperial Highness Prince Mikasa.

Today also happens to be Labour Thanksgiving Day in Japan. So let me give thanks for the long and fruitful relationship that Canada and Japan have enjoyed for several decades.

These celebrations of His Majesty the Emperor are a special occasion allowing us to reflect on the strong ties that unite both of our peoples.

Allow me to recall His Majesty's two visits to Canada: first in 1953 as the Crown Prince and then in 2009 for a 12-day state visit with Her Majesty the Empress. The warm welcome offered by Canadians on both occasions speaks volumes about the special bond between Canada and Japan.

In fact, His Majesty the Emperor took the time to write a poem about this second visit to Canada:

Here I am again

In Canada where I journeyed

In my days of youth
Greatly impressed am I to see
The new face of this country.

Prime Minister Trudeau chose Japan for his first bilateral trip to Asia last May [2016] on the sidelines of the G7, when he and Sophie Grégoire-Trudeau had the pleasure of meeting His Majesty the Emperor and Her Majesty the Empress. The visit was a success in part because Japanese and Canadian people uphold many of the same values: democracy, freedom, a respect for human rights and the rule of law—and the belief that we have the duty to strengthen these principles in our own countries and around the world.

Both of our governments also believe in inclusive growth—growth for everyone—and that open and progressive trade, not isolation, is the best way to benefit the middle class and those working hard to join it. As trading nations, Japan and Canada should work together to take advantage of new opportunities presented by the evolution of the global economy.

Minister for Foreign Affairs [Fumio] Kishida's visit to Canada last February was the first such visit in 19 years.

Last April, my wife, Janine Krieger, and I had the pleasure of visiting Japan for the G7 foreign ministers meeting in Hiroshima. We will never forget our visit to the Peace Memorial. It was an unforgettable experience and a reminder to all of us that we must foster peace, an area of long-standing cooperation between Canada and Japan. We will never stop seeking to rid the world of nuclear weapons—a point my G7 colleagues and I reaffirmed by signing the Hiroshima Declaration [on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation].

Our government is fully engaged in achieving the goal of a world without nuclear weapons and to working with Japan, as we have for decades, as partners on this issue. To this end, Canada is leading the process toward the fissile material cut-off treaty, which is long overdue.

Canada, with the longest coast in the world and with our motto “from coast to coast to coast,” is firmly anchored in the Asia-Pacific region. The Pacific Ocean

defines our two peoples as neighbours. We are a Pacific nation, a multicultural country, enriched by our Asian linkages, including our strong and vibrant Japanese community.

So as we gather tonight to pay tribute to His Majesty the Emperor, let me also use this opportunity to say that the Government of Canada values its strong ties with Japan and that we will work together toward realizing a more peaceful Pacific region among all its peoples.