

Remark by Ambassador Monji
Reception for Japanese Canadian Community
September 22, 2017 at Ambassador's Residence

I am delighted to welcome you all to this reception at my Residence on the occasion of 2017 Annual General Meeting and Conference of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, or NAJC, that will start tomorrow. I am glad that the meeting is held in Ottawa at this timing, so that I can host this reception and attend tomorrow's Gala dinner before leaving for Japan towards the end of next month upon completion of my duty in Canada. Well, I received an official notice to go back to Japan only two days ago.

I have been lucky to be posted in Canada. I could watch the strength of the Canadian nation and its dynamic evolution at a time Canada is celebrating the 150th Anniversary of its Confederation. This year also marks the 75th anniversary of the Incarceration of the Japanese Canadians.

As I will be addressing you again at the Gala dinner tomorrow, tonight I would like to briefly touch upon Japan-Canada relations. After my arrival in Canada two and a half years ago, I was shocked to discover that we were not at all at the zenith of our relationship. Japan had been the number 2 trading partner to Canada until 2002. Japan has recently been lagging behind in the 5th place, after the U.S., China, Mexico, and the U.K.

The number of Japanese visitors to Canada peaked in 1996, reaching 720,000, while the number in 2016 was 320,000, less than half of the peak year figure. I was disappointed, but at the same time, I took this fact as an indication of huge potential for developing our relations once again, and I have exerted all my efforts to promote Japan-Canada relations in various areas.

On the occasion of his first official visit to Japan in May last year, Prime Minister Trudeau and Prime Minister Abe agreed to launch a "New Era for Japan-Canada Cooperation" focusing on economic partnership, security cooperation and cultural and youth exchanges.

I am pleased that Japan and Canada are both strongly promoting free trade. Japan is one of the major investing countries in Canada, contributing to the Canadian economy including local employment. The scientists of the two countries are now working together in various advanced fields such as nano-technology, sustainable energy, etc.

The defense forces of the two countries are engaged in concrete cooperation, such as dispatch of two Canadian frigates to the Asia-Pacific region including Japan where they participated in joint exercises with Japan's Maritime Self Defense Forces earlier this year. I just came back from Vancouver where I welcomed two vessels of Japan Maritime Self Defense's Training Squadron.

I have been especially keen to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges. The number of Canadian tourists visiting Japan registered a record high number three years in a row, reaching to 270,000. Canadian people are now more interested in Japan and its culture. At the end of August I could witness the enthusiasm of Canadian people on everything Japanese at the Japan Festival 2017 in Mississauga, the biggest Japan Festival in Canada. I truly feel that we are now in the "New Era for Japan-Canada Cooperation".

And I highly appreciate the work of Japanese Canadian community to promote Japan in every corner of cities in Canada and to help Canadians better understand Japan. The NAJC's vision states: "it seeks a strong, unified community founded on diversity for the enrichment of Canada." Your contribution to the Canadian society will in turn increase Japan's presence in Canada and eventually benefit Japan as well.

Looking ahead, in 2018, we will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Nikkei Redress as well as the 90th Anniversary of Japan-Canada diplomatic relations. We are therefore standing at a milestone in the great history of Japanese Canadians.

All of these occasions will serve as further opportunities for us to build a solid, long-lasting bridge between the two countries and peoples across the Pacific.

Tonight I hope you will be able to enjoy Japanese food and the exquisite sake. I would like to conclude by wishing you a successful meeting.

Thank you.