

Remark by Ambassador Monji
NAJC GALA Dinner at Museum of History
Friday, September 23

I am delighted to be here with you tonight at this Gala Dinner and would like to express my sincere gratitude to the NAJC, the OJCA and all the other members of the Japanese Canadian community here in Canada for kindly inviting me with my wife to this Gala Dinner.

Since my arrival in Canada in April 2015, my wife and I have enjoyed many good experiences in this great country including two rather mild winters. Having spent over 42 years in foreign services, I say that Canadians are one of the nicest and kindest peoples in the world. I feel that Canadians in general have good impression towards Japan, and the Japanese people also have the same positive feeling towards Canada. It is sad to say that my tenure here in Canada as Ambassador is coming to an end and I will be leaving this beautiful country next month, with wonderful memories.

Since we are in the Museum of History, allow me to touch upon the history of Japanese Canadians. This year 2017 marks the 150th anniversary of the Confederation of Canada as well as the 140th anniversary of Japanese immigration. The first Japanese immigrant arrived in Canada only ten years after Canada was born. This year also marks the 75th anniversary of the Incarceration of Japanese Canadians, which took place at a halfway point in Canada's history. I am very pleased and honoured to be able to witness this important year in the history of Japanese Canadians.

We all know that many Japanese Canadians were forcibly incarcerated and deported by the Canadian government back in the 1940s, due to the hostility and discrimination against Japanese. My heart aches every time I recollect this part of the history of Japanese Canadians, and today again when I stood here and face generations of Japanese Canadians who experienced the suffering in a direct or indirect way. I could learn the feeling of those Japanese Canadians by visiting various exhibitions and reading books. The film entitled "Vancouver Asahi", a story about a Japanese Canadian baseball team *Asahi* before the WWII, also well depicted how Japanese Canadians combatted prejudice and discrimination against Japanese and maintained moral in undergoing hardships.

Many Japanese Canadians from the time of *Asahi* up until now lived with dignity as Japanese Canadians, making significant contribution to the development of Canada and its society and, thus, to Japan's reputation in Canada. Without the efforts of these Japanese

Canadians, Canadians today would not have as friendly and respectful impression on Japan and the Japanese people as we enjoy now.

In this regard, I highly appreciate the work of the NAJC and its chapters across Canada for the past seventy years as galvanizing force of unity and solidarity of Japanese Canadians. Without their determination and hard work, the redress would not have been possible. In this regard, nothing would better epitomize the achievement of the NAJC than the Acknowledgment in 1988 by Prime Minister Mulroney, which states: [I quote] “The Government of Canada, on behalf of all Canadians, recognizes, with great respect, the fortitude and determination of Japanese Canadians who, despite great stress and hardship, retain their commitment and loyalty to Canada and contribute so richly to the development of the Canadian nation.” [end of quote]

Next year will be the 30th year since the Redress. We always learn from history, and I believe that the NAJC conference today and tomorrow serves as a fitting opportunity to reflect on where the Japanese Canadians have reached, where they are heading in the future and what Japan means to them..

The Embassy and all four Consulates-General of Japan always enjoy exchanges with Japanese Canadian community and appreciate their various activities to promote Japanese arts and culture covering from traditional to contemporary ones, such as Judo, Karate, Kendo and other martial arts, Ikebana, Tea ceremony, “Taiko” performance, “Bon-odori”, “Mochitsuki”, and pop culture including Anime, Manga and Cosplay. Well, the list is long. I hope you will include “Sake”, a proud national drink of Japan.

The Government of Japan annually invites several young Japanese Canadians to Japan in order to give them an opportunity to learn about Japanese culture, society, and different issues of politics and economy that Japan is facing. We hope that they will feel closer to their ancestors’ mother country and be interested in becoming a bridge between Japan and Canada.

Next year, we will be celebrating the 90th Anniversary of Japan-Canada diplomatic relations. We would like to celebrate this historic year hand in hand with the Japanese Canadian community. I believe my successor will engage in further cooperation between our Embassy and the Japanese Canadian community to this end.

In closing, I wish to express my gratitude to all the staff members of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, as well as all the local members and volunteers from the Ottawa Japanese Community Association and Ottawa Japanese Cultural Centre, for their hard work to make this Gala Dinner and other commemorative events happen. And last but not least, I would like to thank everyone here tonight for all the support you have rendered to me during my time here in Canada. I wish all of you the very best for the continued prosperity of the Japanese Canadian community.

Thank you.