

Ambassador's Speech – His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday – February 22, 2021

The Honorable guests,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. Bonsoir. It is my honour to welcome you to our virtual National Day event. Bienvenue à notre évènement virtuel pour la fête nationale du Japon.

I remember as if it was yesterday that about a year ago, we held the reception on the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's first birthday in the 'Reiwa' era. Since then, over the course of one year, all of our lives have changed dramatically due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, I am delighted to be able to celebrate virtually our National Day and His Majesty the Emperor's 61st birthday with you, in spite of the restrictions on us gathering.

The situation with the novel coronavirus continues to be critical in Canada and Japan, and around the world. While we can now see a glimmer of hope as vaccinations have started, we cannot let our guard down yet as new variants of the virus have been detected in many countries, including ours.

This past year has been very difficult for many people in our two countries and around the world. I would like to extend my heartfelt sympathies to those who have lost loved ones and are facing severe difficulties in their lives due to this pandemic. I would also like to thank and express my profound respect to all the doctors and the healthcare workers on the frontlines.

As His Majesty the Emperor stated in his New Year's video message, humanity has experienced a number of horrific pandemics and natural disasters in the past, however, each time they overcame these challenges thanks to the bonds of unity and perseverance. I am confident

that we can get through these difficult times, Japanese and Canadians working together as true friends.

Shortly before midnight Saturday the 13th the 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck Japan. Although there were no casualties, it reminded us of “the Great East Japan Earthquake” of March ten years ago. Despite the devastating impacts, Japan has been consistently recovering and rebuilding with the generous and compassionate support of the international community, including Canada, and the solidarity of the people.

At the same time, Japan has also been sharing lessons learned from its experience with the international community and raising awareness to natural disasters. In 2015, Japan hosted the 3rd UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai and contributed to the adoption of the “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030”. This framework offers the new international guiding principles for disaster risk reduction, and ideas suggested by Japan such as “build back better” were included in it.

I wish to express our renewed gratitude to the people and government of Canada for their assistance in the reconstruction and recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake. With the cooperation of the international community, perseverance, and solidarity, we can get through the COVID-19 pandemic as well.

Today, there is great potential for collaboration between Japan and Canada to “build back better” from the pandemic. Japan has been leading international efforts for universal healthcare with the aim of “leaving no one’s health behind”. Prime Minister Suga promotes green growth and digital technologies as his Cabinet’s policy priorities. In addition, Japan and Canada are seeking out possibilities to use the world’s leading supercomputer “Fugaku” to study coronavirus

infections. I believe Japan and Canada are on the same page on these efforts and hope we can “build back better” through collaboration between our two countries.

In my remarks at last year’s reception, I mentioned that one of my missions as Ambassador of Japan to Canada was to make Japan a bridge builder between the Indo-Pacific and Canada. This pandemic has reinforced my conviction that we need more international cooperation and Canada’s presence in the area than ever before. On February 2, Prime Minister Suga and Prime Minister Trudeau in their telephone conversation recommitted to the shared vision for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. I will redouble my efforts to substantiate our cooperation to realize this strategic vision.

While we may be physically apart right now, it is important to promote people-to-people ties and mutual understanding between our two countries during this pandemic. The Embassy has endeavoured to meet as many people as possible and to hold various online events in order to strengthen our friendship and collaboration during these difficult times.

I thank all of you who are making tremendous efforts to develop and deepen Japan-Canada relations.

I wish you good health and all the best in 2021, and I hope that we can all meet in person next year! Merci à tous. Thank you.