

Ambassador's Welcome Reception

(Wednesday, 27 May)

Minister Bishop, honourable members of Parliament, your
Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be able to welcome you all to my
Residence this evening. This is my first official event since presenting
my credentials to the Governor General.

For those of you who haven't met me, let me briefly introduce
myself. I actually started my diplomatic career here in Canberra,
arriving as a junior diplomatic officer back in 1981 after undertaking
my studies at an American college.

One thing that struck me back then was just how far away Australia
was from the East Coast of the US. It took around 23 hours to reach
Sydney, and that included a stop-over in Auckland along the way.

Once I arrived, however, I quickly found out just how good life in
Australia was, and thoroughly enjoyed the two years thereafter that I
spent here.

I should also mention that my wife is very familiar with Australian people as well, as she was a student at Macquarie University in Sydney during the early 1970s with her family before I met her.

She has two younger brothers who are now married to Australian women, one from Melbourne and the other from Adelaide.

Both couples now live happily in Tokyo with their gorgeous children.

They do come back to Australia every now and then to pay visits to their home towns as well.

The parents of one of the two Australian women have joined us here this evening, having come up from Melbourne for this event.

By the way, we have 3 adult sons who are all still single. We hope they will someday find Australian wives like my brothers-in-law.

Both my wife and I therefore feel very privileged to have been given an opportunity to re-establish our connections with Australia, and we shall certainly endeavour to broaden and deepen the relationship that both our countries share with one another.

Another thing that has struck me upon returning to Australia is just how much Canberra has changed. In the early 1980s there weren't as many new buildings or high rise apartments, and the scenery was still very much dominated by open scrubland.

I am impressed by how much Canberra has grown in the interim – indeed, there's a new parliament house just up the road – and am excited at the thought of all of the discoveries that await me.

I do feel very fortunate to have been selected to serve as ambassador during such an auspicious time in our bilateral relationship.

Our long standing economic ties have been transformed and greatly strengthened by the recently concluded Economic Partnership Agreement, of which I was one of the initial negotiators in 2007 and 2008, and we are continuing to build upon our nascent security ties.

The progress that has characterised our relationship owes much to the personal chemistry shared between our two leaders.

Before embarking for Australia to take up my post, I had an audience with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Prime Minister Abe was very clear in emphasising the importance of Australia for Japan, and asked me to give his best regards to Prime Minister Abbott.

In Tokyo I also met many Japanese business leaders, and I found they are all very enthusiastic about their business ties with Australia across a wide range of sectors.

So, with the potential of the relationship so abundantly evident, I have every confidence that together we shall grow even closer. I would therefore like to ask each and every one of you for your valuable assistance in our endeavour, for together we can take our relations to new and greater heights.

I hope you all enjoy this evening.

Thank you very much.