

Remarks by Ambassador Kusaka
at the Canberra Nara Candle Festival
29 October 2016

The Honourable Chief Minister Andrew Barr,

Mrs Narelle Hargreaves, Chair of the Canberra Nara Sister City Committee

Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening. I would first like to express my sincere gratitude to the ACT Government, Chief Minister Barr, the Canberra Nara Sister City Committee, the SES, volunteers and everyone involved in making this event possible, as well as welcome you all here this evening.

I would also like to congratulate Chief Minister Barr on his successful return to the Chief Ministership at the recent ACT Legislative Assembly Election.

As with the Chief Minister, this year is the second time for my wife and I to attend the Canberra-Nara Candle Festival. As I spend quite a lot of time away from my home country, I do miss out on traditional Japanese festivals, especially the food stalls, entertainment, dances, games and fireworks. So imagine my surprise last year to find there was a Japanese-themed festival celebrated by the people of Canberra every year! Maybe you have guessed by now that I have waited all year to attend this Festival.

We Japanese love festivals. It is a local community event, where everyone comes together to celebrate and have a good time. I am delighted to see that community spirit here, and that this Festival has become such a popular annual event in Canberra.

Twenty three years ago, on the 26th of October 1993, the official proclamation for a formal sister city relationship was signed by the Chief Minister of the ACT Government and the Mayor of Nara. I wish to congratulate both cities for developing such strong and enduring relationship with each other for all those years.

During this time, there has been a wide range of exchange activities between our two cities in fields such as business, education, sport, music, and art. Currently,

including Canberra and Nara, there are 108 sister-city relationships between Japan and Australia. I believe these exchanges at the grass-roots level play an important role in supporting our bilateral relationship.

Speaking of which, this year marks the 40th year anniversary of the signing of the Basic Treaty for Friendship and Co-operation between Japan and Australia. It is local government and grassroots exchanges like the Candle Festival that has and will continue to support broader Japan-Australia relations. I will continue to strive to further Japan-Australia relations together with you.

Lastly, I would like to thank again everyone involved in this year's Candle Festival, and also to all of you for coming to this spectacular event. I hope the friendship between Canberra and Nara as well as between Japan and Australia continues to grow.

Thank you.