

Ambassador's Message No.51 Cowra and Japan – Symbol of reconciliation and friendship between Japan and Australia

4 October 2017

Dear friends

On Saturday 23 September, I attended the Sakura Matsuri Cherry Blossom Festival and a reception held in the Japanese gardens in Cowra, New South Wales, approximately 200 kilometres north of Canberra. Beginning in 1989, this annual festival is held by the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre and co-hosted by the Embassy of Japan with the aim to introduce Japanese culture and promote friendship and goodwill between Japan and Australia.

I am sure many of you are familiar with the Cowra breakout that occurred 73 years ago during WWII, however please allow me to introduce this to you once more. On August 5, 1944, Japanese prisoners of war attempted to escape from a war camp in Cowra. 241 Japanese POWs and 4 Australian soldiers were killed during the incident. In 1964, a Japanese war cemetery was established under a proposal by the Japanese government for the 522 Japanese who died in Australia during the war.



On August 5 this year, I attended a wreath laying ceremony at the Cowra Japanese War Cemetery with Mr Bill West,
Mayor of Cowra

The people of Cowra were determined to turn Cowra into the symbol of reconciliation and friendship between our two countries. In November 1978, through financial contributions from the Australian federal government, New South Wales state government, Expo 70 Osaka and the Japan Chamber of Commerce and

Industry, as well as receiving full support from the Cowra Shire Council, the Cowra Japanese Garden was opened in the presence of former Ambassador of Japan to Australia, Mr Yoshio Okawara and former deputy prime minister, Mr Doug Anthony. Further significant construction work was carried out on the gardens thanks to the financial contributions by the Australian federal government, New South Wales state government, Japan World Exposition Fund, Tokyo Metropolitan Government (sister-state of NSW) and numerous businesses and corporations, and was completed in 1986. It is now said the Cowra Japanese Garden is the largest Japanese garden in the southern hemisphere.



Their Majesties The Emperor and Empress of Japan visited the Japanese war cemetery in Cowra during their official visit to Australia as Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Princess in 1973. Princess Sayako and Prince Akishino also paid visits in 1992 and 1995 respectively. Then in November 2011, the Emperor and Empress met briefly with Mr Don Kibbler at the Imperial Palace where they expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the efforts of the people of Cowra in giving the Japanese POWs a proper burial and preserving their graves over the years. Mr Kibbler is an originator and former chairman of the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. We are strongly aware of the need to nurture our relations with Cowra, especially with the visits by members of the Imperial family and their affinity for Cowra over the years.

A large number of people participated in this year's Sakura Matsuri Cherry Blossom Festival, including representatives from the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Japan clubs and associations, and Japanese people residing in Sydney. Held in the Japanese garden, attendees were able to enjoy Japanese culture under the full

bloom of the cherry blossom trees with taiko drumming and chorus group performances, Japanese martial arts demonstrations, such as aikido and sumo wrestling, as well as bonsai, ikebana and tea ceremony displays and presentations. Footage of this year's festival were even broadcasted on Japanese news bulletins.



Sakura Chorus performing songs in Japanese



Taiko performance by Wadaiko Rindo



Guests enjoying performances on the main stage



Tea ceremony demonstration by Urasanke Tankokai

In my speech at a reception held on the night of the festival, I spoke of the tragic incident that occurred 73 years ago and the significant role Cowra has played in the reconciliation and friendship between Japan and Australia through various monuments, such as the Cowra Japanese War Cemetery, Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre, World Peace Bell and Sakura Avenue. In celebrating the cherry blossom, the iconic Japanese symbol of hope, I expressed my hope that we, the people of Japan and Australia, never cease to dream for success in our two countries' strong, enduring and long-lasting friendship.



My speech at the reception



Together with Mr Bob Griffiths, Chairman of the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre and his wife, Mrs Griffiths

73 years have passed since the end of WWII and Japan and Australia have become important and essential regional partners. Our bilateral relationship today continues to deepen and strengthen through cooperation in a variety of spheres, including economics, culture, people-to-people exchange, security and defence as well as cooperation on the international stage. Our relationship is based on mutual trust and we share the values of freedom and democracy, international rule of law, and peace, stability and prosperity for the international community.

I believe our strong bilateral ties and friendship as well as the numerous movements and events for reconciliation over half a century in Cowra are what form the foundation of the wonderful partnership our two countries enjoy to this day. We must not forget the dedicated efforts of those who have helped us along the way. It is absolutely imperative that we share this with future generations in Japan and Australia, and take our positive and robust relationship to a higher level for many years to come. I renewed this pledge again this year as the Ambassador of Japan to Australia as I celebrated the full bloom of the cherry blossoms in the Cowra Japanese Garden.

Yours sincerely,

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Sumio Kusaka

Ambassador of Japan to Australia