

Ambassador's Message No.54
(55th Japan Australia Joint Business Conference)

23 October 2017

Dear friends,

I recently travelled to Japan to attend the 55th Japan Australia Joint Business Conference, which was held in Tokyo from 8-10 October. This conference is the largest annual meeting of Japanese and Australian business leaders and is jointly hosted by the Japan-Australia Business Co-operation Committee (JABCC) and its Australian counterpart, the Australia-Japan Business Co-operation Committee (AJBCC). The first meeting between the two business committees was held in Tokyo in 1963 and since then the location for the annual meeting has alternated between Japan and Australia. The conference provides a forum for discussion of a wide range of topics, including: the economic situations of Japan and Australia; bilateral trade occurring in regards to resources, agriculture and other areas; investment; tourism; information technology; the environment; and the security and development of the Asia-Pacific. The conference has for many years played a crucial role in deepening and expanding the economic and broader ties of Japan and Australia, and continues to do so.

2017 marks the 60th Anniversary of the Japan-Australia Commerce Agreement and when I arrived at the Joint Business Conference this year the first thing I was struck by was the vast number of people present. I could see many CEOs and other senior executives of major Japanese businesses, as well as young professionals and even former Ambassadors from both nations. I am told that this year's conference was attended by some 380 people, the highest number in the event's long history. This remarkable turnout goes to show that the relations of Japan and Australia are not only strong, but indeed stronger than ever before.

This year's joint conference featured presentations by Japanese and Australian business leaders focusing on such themes as energy, resources, financial services and innovation. There was also a future leader's meeting and a panel discussion on what the future ties of Japan and Australia might look like.

At the opening of the conference, I read a message from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. As stated by Prime Minister Abe: “Between Japan and Australia, flows of people, goods and capital are growing at a rapid rate. On this occasion, I wish to acknowledge and express my deep thanks for the pivotal role that the Japan Australia Joint Business Conference has played in making the bilateral economic relationship what it is today. Internationally, we are witnessing a rise in protectionist sentiment, and as key advocates for free trade, it is imperative that Japan and Australia cooperate even more closely. We must take on leadership roles to bring the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) into effect at an early date, and work together to realise a comprehensive, balanced and high-quality Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)”. As I read Prime Minister Abe’s message, I found myself agreeing with his sentiments wholeheartedly.



Delivering Prime Minister Abe’s message (photo: JABCC)

At the conclusion of the meeting, the two chairs released a joint statement expressing the two committees’ agreement to “continue to proactively resolve issues that affect the bilateral business environment” and to work together “towards the swift conclusion of TPP11”. The two chairs also noted the need to overcome “obstacles posed by the recent changes to Australia’s visa system applying to workers from overseas” and committed to bolstering cooperation in regards to “innovation (and) newly developing business fields”. The two chairs also highlighted the need to seek out further “opportunities for business in third countries”.

Together with Australia’s Ambassador to Japan, the Hon. Richard Court AC, I was invited to participate in and make a speech to a roundtable for the Australia Japan Future Generations Group. My remarks centred on the theme of “Japan-Australian relations in 2030” and I emphasised that as uncertainty in the Asia-Pacific has risen, Japan and Australia have drawn even closer together. I contended that in the years to come, bilateral engagement will continue to grow in respect to energy security and food security, and I also predicted that we would see more Japanese investment in the services sector in Australia. Moreover, I stressed that there was much scope for Japan and Australia to work together to effectively respond to the challenges of our aging societies, and I said that cooperation between our two countries in the area of defence and security would strengthen our national security. In closing, I urged the future leaders to “be mindful of opportunities to cooperate both in other states and indeed at the regional level” and I called on those in attendance to harness our close bilateral ties and mutual trust to establish joint business ventures in Asia.



(photo: Australian Embassy, Japan)



(photo: Australian Embassy, Japan)

I arrived in Canberra two and a half years ago to take on my current role and during that time I have seen firsthand the immense potential of the Japan-Australia relationship. It was a great pleasure to share my experiences and outlook for the ties of our two nations with the Future Generations Group, and I hope and expect that under their stewardship, the Japan-Australia relationship will continue to deepen and expand up to 2030 and beyond. ([The full text of my speech is available here.](#))



(photo: Australian Embassy, Japan)

Yours sincerely,

/S/

Sumio Kusaka

Ambassador of Japan to Australia