

# Speech

**Presented by HE Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo**

**Ambassador of Japan to Australia**

**On the occasion of a special screening of the film, *Persona Non Grata***

**at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland**

**On Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021**

Good evening.

First of all, I would like to sincerely thank Michał and Barbara and the professional team here at the Polish Embassy for hosting tonight's event.

It is my absolute pleasure to finally have this special screening of the Japanese film, *Persona Non Grata*.

When I first met with Michał and Barbara just after my arrival, it was Michał who proposed co-hosting tonight.

And as it turns out, Michał and I have a lot in common and we quickly became mates.

As you might know, Michał and Barbara met while studying at Kanazawa University in Japan as Japanese Government Scholars.

I am deeply impressed by their knowledge of and passion for all things Japan.

I'd like to welcome the Ambassador of Lithuania, His Excellency Mr Darius Degutis.

Of course, this movie took place in Lithuania, and so it is very fitting that we have the company of Darius with us this evening.

This film tells the story of Japanese Consul, SUGIHARA Chiune who issued thousands of transit visas to Jewish refugees in Lithuania, enabling them

passage through Japan as they sought refuge in a third country.

These transit visas are referred to as “visas for life” and Sugihara’s courageous act saved thousands of displaced Jews.

As many as 100,000 people today are said to be the descendants of the recipients of Sugihara’s visas.

The international community know the dark chapter of our history, the Holocaust and it should not be forgotten.

Within this darkness, light can be found in the form of human kindness and compassion.

In 1985, Sugihara was given the honour by the State of Israel as one of the Righteous Among the Nations.

He is the only Japanese national to have ever received this honour.

The actor who plays the wife of Sugihara in this movie is acclaimed Japanese star, Koyuki.

You may know her from the very famous Hollywood film, *The Last Samurai*.

I am quite sure there are some fans in this room.

I am told there are many famous Polish actors in this film, so you may be able to spot your favourite, as well!

Last week, my wife Kaoru and I went to Melbourne to open the National Gallery of Victoria’s new exhibition showcasing Mrs Pauline Gandel’s exquisite collection of *Kai-Awase*.

These are a traditional Japanese pastime of shell-matching.

It may be a coincidence, but I have had many opportunities to meet with prominent Australians of Jewish and Polish backgrounds.

Earlier this year, I met with Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg.

And it was Josh who suggested I meet with Mr and Mrs Gandel before anyone else!

And so I did!

In Melbourne, Mrs Linda Dessau, the Governor of Victoria was gracious enough to provide my wife and me an overnight stay at Government House.

Governor Dessau is Australia's first Jewish Governor and she is also of Polish descent.

So I feel all these meetings were leading up to today's film screening!

Mr Frydenberg presented me with a book by Mr Eddie Jaku, who describes himself as "the happiest man on earth" despite facing the unspeakable hardships of the Holocaust.

In his book, Eddie wrote "If enough people had stood up, and said 'Enough! What are you doing? What is wrong with you?' then the course of history would have been different."

Sugihara was one of those who stood up.

He believed in what was right and acted on it.

But he was not the only Japanese to do so.

There are many others who acted like SUGIHARA despite tremendous difficulties.

Lieutenant General HIGUCHI Kiichiro helped Jewish refugees travel through Manchuria to a safer destination. This is known as the "Higuchi Route".

Australia welcomed many Jewish refugees into its country.

Passing on the baton of human kindness and compassion.

And this saved many precious lives and brought hope for the future.

There is great respect for SUGIHARA as a diplomat, but more importantly as a human being.

I am very delighted to have this opportunity to share his story with you this evening.

I hope you enjoy tonight's special screening.

END