

Speech

**Presented by HE Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo, Ambassador of Japan to Australia
On the occasion of the Conferral of the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun
on Ms Julia Gillard AC
Ambassador's Official Residence, Canberra
4 February 2022**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

I am absolutely delighted to be able to hold this conferral of the Grand Cordon of the Rising Sun in person with you all today.

I understand that for you, Ms Gillard, it has been a long journey home, with many COVID-shaped bumps, and so I must begin by thanking you for going great lengths to make it here tonight.

To us Japanese, it is very strange not to be able to refer to you as Prime Minister.

In Japan, once someone becomes a Prime Minister they will be called *sōri* for the rest of their life.

I just wanted you to know this, in case you felt inclined to move to Japan.

You would be very, very welcome.

As an Ambassador, I am privileged to be able to take part in a great many momentous occasions.

Even so, the opportunity to confer Japan's highest honor on a former Prime Minister, particularly one so respected as Ms Gillard, is incredibly special.

I have heard that in Minamisanriku, she is more popular than most Japanese politicians.

But don't tell anyone that.

While, like Ms Gillard, I do my best not to poke my nose into Australian domestic politics, I think I can safely say that, according to the many Australians I have met, she is one of the most widely loved former Prime Ministers.

In Japan, Ms Gillard's actions following the devastating Tohoku Earthquake quickly made her into a symbol of friendship and compassion during one of our darkest hours.

She met with survivors in an evacuation centre where she provided much needed food supplies and gifted children with Koala and Kangaroo toys.

Under her leadership, out of the four RAAF C-17 transport aircraft, three were sent to Japan, along with an urban search and rescue team.

So too was special pumping equipment required to douse the Fukushima reactors with water, in order to prevent a meltdown.

Ms Gillard has said about her decision to become the first foreign leader to visit Japan following the disaster that she did so as 'a visible way of saying that Japan was coming through this profound period of tragedy'.

I am glad to be able to share with you that, after more than a decade of recovery efforts, approximately forty-eight thousand public housings have been built for survivors.

New, shiny roads that, when combined, total the length of the distance from Melbourne to Canberra have been constructed at incredible speed.

This has allowed disaster struck areas to benefit from improved transport access, boosting industry and tourism.

Ninety-four per cent of the farmland affected by the tsunami has resumed operations, along with ninety-eight per cent of seafood processing facilities.

And, still today, the profound human impact of Ms Gillard's support for Japan's recovery can be seen in the community.

According to the *Japanese Educational Exchanges and Services*, which helped to manage the Education Assistance Program she established, many of those who went to Australia on

the program are now using their experiences to make enormous contributions to their communities.

For example, Mr ICHIJIO Hitoshi, who came to Queensland as a social work student, went on to establish an organisation in Fukushima which provides training and support for companies who employ people with a disability.

He also speaks at schools and universities about social welfare in Australia.

Then there is Ms SUEMATSU Kazuko, who undertook research in Sydney on multicultural education, and is now a Special Advisor at the Global Learning Center at Tohoku University, where she develops new study abroad programs for students.

And, there is Mr MARUYAMA Shigenao, who conducted thermal engineering research in Sydney and is now the President of the Hachinohe arm of Japan's prestigious National Institute of Technology, where he has overseen student exchange with the ANU.

On her first overseas visit, Ms Gillard famously said that she would probably feel more comfortable in a school watching kids learn to read in Australia, than in Brussels at international meetings.

Some took this to mean she had more confidence and passion for education than diplomacy.

I hope that today's ceremony highlights how she has managed to create a legacy in both.

As her illustrious post-politics career proves, the two overlap in many areas.

Her seven years as the Chair of the Global Partnership for Education Board, and her establishment of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership both attest to this.

She has gone from being a role model for Australian women, to being a role model for women everywhere who aspire to leadership, including in Japan.

I am happy to report, that for the first time in history, over half of all fast track recruits admitted into Japan's foreign ministry last year were women.

I hope that among them there is a future Julia Gillard, or perhaps several.

For now, let me convey my deepest congratulations to the Julia Gillard before us, who helped Japan to recognise Australia as one of its truest friends.

Congratulations and thank you!