

# Acceptance Speech

Presented by HE Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo

Ambassador of Japan to Australia

On the occasion of the 2021 Rotary Club of Cowra Peace Award

at The Cowra Bowling Club – Thursday 24 February 2022

President Ian Docker,  
Councillor Bill West, Mayor of Cowra  
Mr Ian Brown, Chairman of the Australian Chapter of the World Peace Bell Association  
Distinguished guests  
Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening.

It is my absolute pleasure to finally be here tonight to attend the Rotary Club of Cowra's special dinner and accept this prestigious award in person.

I am very honoured but humbled to accept this award, so I thank you very much.

It is rare for diplomats to be recognised for the work we do.

So to be awarded while still alive means I must have done something right!

We sometimes cop criticism from the public and media, which is sadly, part of our job.

However, one of a diplomat's most important jobs is to promote a peaceful solution for the countries involved while protecting the benefit of your own country to reach an agreeable outcome.

When negotiations break down and all diplomatic efforts are exhausted, an armed conflict can occur.

Sadly, in human history, many wars have happened and human tragedies have been repeated.

It is hard to imagine in this beautiful place called Cowra, a POW camp once stood where many Japanese and Australians lost their precious lives following the Breakout.

Former Japanese Ambassador HATAKENAKA Atsushi once said, “Cowra is the spiritual home of Japan-Australia relations”.

This resonates with me every time I visit Cowra.

Even before I presented my credentials to the Governor-General, I came to Cowra as soon as the opportunity arose.

I am blown away by the serenity and beauty of this part of Australia.

And in this tranquil, quiet Aussie town, many souls rest peacefully.

While I do not have the special ability to communicate with these souls, I am sure they are very grateful to the people of Cowra for their prayers and preservation of the Japanese War Cemetery.

As a Japanese, I am forever grateful for your kindness.

And I have the deepest respect for the people of Cowra.

Despite the tragic chapter in our history, Japan and Australia have come a long way.

Our bilateral relationship is going from strength to strength.

Last month, Prime Ministers KISHIDA and Morrison signed the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement.

This opens a new chapter for elevated security and defence cooperation and is the

next step in the 'Special Strategic Partnership'.

Just two weeks ago, Foreign Minister HAYASHI attended the foreign ministerial meeting of the Quad in Melbourne.

Support for Tonga is another example of our bilateral cooperation.

As part of the international response, Japan deployed four transport aircraft to move essential humanitarian assistance supplies from Japan to Tonga via RAAF base Amberley near Brisbane.

I truly believe that Japan and Australia's relationship will continue to grow in size and scope and as a result, it will promote peace and stability in our region.

Cowra has and will continue to form the very foundation of our two countries' friendship.

The Cowra-Seikei student exchange has been providing the younger generation with an opportunity to learn more about the tragic history and goodwill of the people of Cowra for over 50 years.

The Cowra Japanese Garden is also a symbol of the friendship and in my view, the most beautiful Japanese Garden outside Japan.

It has been well maintained and preserved by the people of Cowra for future generations, ensuring its legacy will live on.

The Rotary Club of Cowra Peace Award has been awarded to outstanding individuals and I am very humbled to be included in such a wonderful cohort.

As the Japanese Ambassador, I will contribute in different ways.

However, I renew my vow to keep working hard to advance the relationship between Japan and Cowra, and indeed between Japan and Australia.

Once again, thank you so much for your recognition and with much gratitude, I sincerely accept this prestigious award.

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