

**Speech by H.E Ambassador YAMAGAMI Shingo on the occasion  
of the conferral of the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising  
Sun on the Hon. Anthony 'Tony' John Abbott  
Thursday, 14 July 2022**

**(Acknowledgements)**

**1. Introduction**

- Ladies and gentlemen, before we begin tonight's ceremony, I would like to take a moment in memory of former Prime Minister ABE Shinzo, a close friend of Tony's and a champion of the Japan-Australia relationship.
- I have been truly touched by the many messages of condolence and kindness that we have received from Australians from all walks of life.

- This serves as a fitting testament to the great contribution that Prime Minister ABE made to our bilateral relationship. He was greatly admired and he will be greatly missed.
- May he rest in peace.
- And so, ladies and gentlemen, let us return to tonight's proceedings.
- I am honoured to welcome you all tonight to the conferral ceremony for the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun.
- This is the highest Japanese accolade, and is a reflection of the profound gratitude felt by the nation of Japan towards an individual.

- On this occasion, I am delighted to celebrate the conferral of this award upon the Honourable Tony Abbott.
- In Japan, once someone becomes prime minister, they will be forever referred to as 'prime minister'.
- However I have heard in the 'rough-and-tumble' world of Australian politics, although one might become prime minister, once they leave office their honorifics will revert to the more humble 'Mr' or 'Ms'.
- This award is not given to former Australian prime ministers lightly, for only a select few will receive it.
- Furthermore, it is exceedingly rare for a member of the Japanese Cabinet to travel to Australia in order to attend a conferral ceremony.

- However, such is the significant impact that former Prime Minister Abbott had upon the relationship, that we have been joined here today by the Honourable KANEKO Yasushi, Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications in the KISHIDA Government, to celebrate with us today.
- Welcome, Minister KANEKO.

## **2. Achievements and Contributions**

### **(1) “Special Strategic Partnership”**

- Ladies and gentlemen, it would be no exaggeration on my part to say that Tony built the foundations to take our already close and friendly relationship to the next level.

- From his earliest days in office, and even before then, Tony showed a passion for our bilateral relationship that nothing could extinguish, not even a fiery from the Davidson Rural Fire Brigade.
- Tony has been a champion for this relationship from day one, and put in the hard yards to prove it.
- Before Tony came into office, there's no denying that the bilateral relationship with Japan was taken for granted.
- But when Tony arrived, just like his time at Oxford, he decided to punch out a few truths to ensure everyone knew where he stood.
- He simply declared that Japan 'is our best friend in Asia'.

- In 2014, it was Tony who graciously offered the opportunity to then Japanese Prime Minister ABE Shinzo to address the Australian Parliament, thus making him the first Japanese Prime Minister to ever be afforded that honour.
- It was Tony's foresight that elevated our bilateral relationship to that of a 'Special Strategic Partnership'.

## **(2) Defence Cooperation, Economic Cooperation**

- Tony also demonstrated the importance of reconciliation between our two countries.
- His epoch-making statement to "Give Japan a fair go" brought about a new phase in Japan-Australian relations, and is fondly remembered by many Japanese today.

- That same degree of earnestness and drive manifested itself in Tony's work on submarines.
- The correctness of his strong advocacy for Australia to adopt the Soryu-class submarine has been confirmed by subsequent events.
- It was the Abbott Government that gave the tick of approval to start negotiations for the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA).
- Japan also benefitted from the invitation extended by the Abbott Government to the Japan Self-Defence Force to participate in Exercise Talisman Sabre for the very first time.
- It was the Abbott Government that also signed and concluded the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement.

- So rather than try and wait for years to peel back tariffs and restrictions one by one, Tony went all in and bit it off in one go, and we have been all the better for it.

### **3. Conclusion**

- Ladies and gentlemen, we all know Tony's contribution to elevating the Japan-Australia relationship.
- It is a self-evident truth and an extraordinary achievement.
- Like a pair of R.M Williams in the Pilbara sun, when the dust settles you find that he blazed a trail for others to follow, and copped a few blisters for his troubles along the way.



- Tony, you are only 64 years old. By Japanese standards you're considered 'young'.
- I hope that sports-loving Tony will still make good use of the bike gear that he received as a gift from Japan, and that in robust health he will continue to lend his considerable energy and talent to furthering our bilateral relationship in the years ahead.
- To Tony, I offer the warmest, most genuine congratulations on this award, and here's to many more years of friendship to come.
- Very well done, mate!

**[Ends]**