

SPEECH

**Presented by HE Mr SUZUKI Kazuhiro,
Ambassador of Japan to Australia
On the occasion of Cowra Koyo Matsuri
Mayoral Reception Speech
Monday 29 May 2023**

Councillor Bill West, Mayor of Cowra, Acting Chairman of the Cowra
Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre
Fellow Garden Board members
Fellow Cowra Councillors
Mr Paul Devery, Council General Manager and Mrs Carolyn Devery
Mr Mark Baillie, Chairman of the United States Studies Centre, and
Ms Robyn Baillie
Mr Yoshiaki Matsunaga, President of Urasenke Sydney

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for your kind invitation to attend Koyo Matsuri.

My appointment as the Ambassador of Japan to Australia only began after presenting my credentials to the Governor-General on May 17th.

So I am very honoured to have this opportunity just 12 days after the ceremony to visit Cowra as my predecessors have regarded Cowra as the spiritual home of the special friendship Japan and Australia enjoy today.

Before coming to Australia, my previous posting was to Turkey.

Exactly a year ago, at the end of May last year, I was fortunate enough to visit Anzac Cove in Gallipoli where I paid my respects to those who lost their lives during World War I.

I was moved by the Turkish people's sincere gesture of looking after the graves of over 8,000 fallen Australian soldiers on their land even though they were once enemies.

I would like to share with you a quote by a former Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

"...Your sons are in our bosom. They are in peace. After having lost their lives on this soil they have become our sons as well."

When I learned of Cowra's tragic history, I felt that Japan and Australia share a similar connection to that of Australia and Turkey.

It was, of course, a different time and a different war, but Gallipoli and Cowra are now symbols of reconciliation.

They were brought together by the goodwill of people of both sides.

Earlier today, I visited the Japanese War Cemetery and the Commonwealth War Cemetery to lay wreaths and pay my respects to the Japanese and Australians buried there.

It is hard to imagine that this tragedy occurred here in this serene, tranquil country town.

As the Ambassador of Japan to Australia, I would sincerely like to thank the people of Cowra for paying their respects and maintaining these war cemeteries so beautifully for decades.

It was also fascinating to see such a big, spectacular Japanese garden outside of Japan.

When I was the Japanese Ambassador to Ethiopia a long time ago, I felt the Japanese garden in the capital, Addis Ababa was the best and largest in the Southern Hemisphere.

However, I understand Cowra's Japanese garden is widely regarded as the one of the best Japanese gardens in the same Hemisphere.

And I am glad Ethiopia does not have to compete with Cowra because they are actually situated in the Northern Hemisphere!

I had to double-check this on the map, by the way...

It has been 50 years since the announcement by Cowra Tourism that a Japanese garden would be built in Cowra.

It is impressive to see how this Japanese garden grew over five decades as the symbol of the mature friendship between Japan and Australia.

We have not only become best friends in Asia, but we also share a special strategic partnership in an ever-changing world.

And, I am very much excited to serve here to further promote the Japan-Australia relationship that was built on the accomplishments of those before us, symbolised by the beautiful garden I'm standing in here today.

Congratulations on this wonderful milestone!

Thank you.