

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL TAKAKO ITO

April 2019

March 8 every year is International Women's Day. Although not yet widely known in Japan, the United Nations has celebrated this day every year since 1975 in recognition of the tremendous works and accomplishments of women and to advocate for women's rights and empowerment. In Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been promoting "womenomics" policies, which have seen remarkable success. Aiming for a "society where women shine" at the international level, Japan has also held the World Assembly for Women (WAW!) since 2014. Because Japan has assumed the Presidency of the G20 this year, WAW! 2019 was held concurrently and in collaboration with W20, one of the engagement groups established to make recommendations to the G20. Various notable women gathered from around the world including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai and Her Excellency Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. A wide variety of thoughtful discussions took place under this year's grand theme, which was "WAW! for Diversity".



In Canada, where the half of the federal Cabinet Ministers are women, various events were held not just on International Women's Day but throughout the month of March, which was recognized as International Women's Month. Our Consulate-General for its part held two events in collaborations with Canadian organizations.



First, on March 4, we participated as one of the co-sponsoring organizations in the SheEO Summit, a gathering of approximately 500 female entrepreneurs, politicians and others. There, we were able to disseminate information on Japan's

womenomics and WAW!/W20. Remarks were given by such notable women as The Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario (and former Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme), and The Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Small Business and Export Promotion. I also had an opportunity to speak, and received an enthusiastic round of applause when I introduced myself as Toronto's first female Consul-General of Japan. We also screened a video produced by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on women's achievements in the STEM fields, and I believe that we were able to effectively put across the message that women in Japan are changing.

Secondly, on the actual International Women's Day, March 8, we held a special hour-long symposium at the University of Toronto entitled "Mentoring Women Leaders: A Conversation on International Women's Day" with approximately 400



people in attendance. Dr. Rose Patten, Chancellor of the U of T, delivered the keynote speech, followed by a roundtable discussion by the University's Vice-President, HR & Equity, Dr. Kelly Hannah-Moffat, along with Dr. Rachel Silvey, Director of the Asian Institute, and myself, moderated by Dr. Sylvia Bashevkin of the Department of Political Science. Here also, I provided information on Japan's initiatives

relating to womenomics and on WAW!/W20, while before the event we repeatedly showed a short video on Japan's support in developing countries to establish societies where women shine. During the question and answer session, I included my personal experiences in conveying a message of support to women whose careers lie ahead of them. We hosted a networking reception after the symposium, and I was tremendously gratified to receive positive comments on the event itself as well as Japan's initiatives.





On March 22, we published a full-page editorial in the Toronto Star, and told its readers about the symposium and WAWI/W20. The editorial's contents were also to remain online on the Star's website for a week afterwards.

From April 1 to 3, the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada will send Canada's first women-only business mission to Japan. The approximately 40 female business leaders and experts from across Canada will have a chance not only to find business opportunities in Japan, but also to establish relations with Japanese women entrepreneurs and business leaders. They will also go on site visits of Japan's high-tech industries and the care economy, as well as give presentations at Kyoto Women's University. I

will personally accompany this mission and will follow-up after returning to Canada, ensuring that it will lead to further strengthening of Japan-Canada relations.

I strongly hope that through such activities, Canadians will receive and appreciate the message that Japan is working in various ways to have women shine domestically and around the world.