

FAREWELL MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL ITO TAKAKO

August 2020



After two years and ten months, the time has come for me to conclude my service as Consul-General of Japan in Toronto and return to Japan. Time truly flies when one is enjoying the moment, and I can hardly believe that I must leave this wonderful post already.

Looking back, I feel that many fortuitous factors combined to make my tenure here genuinely fruitful.

First of all, I was able to work as a diplomat in a city like Toronto, a vibrant cosmopolitan metropolis experiencing the fastest growth in North America and the financial and cultural hub of Canada, which itself is an advanced nation and a valued member of the G7. Ontario's economy is about the same size as that of Switzerland, and its population of 14.7 million is larger than those of most European countries. Consuls-General and Honorary Consuls from approximately 120 countries are posted in Toronto, forming one of the world's largest consular corps. This also illustrates the attention and importance the international community places on Toronto. The city also hosts many large international conventions and events such as the Toronto International Film Festival and Collision, the tech industry's immense international conference. I

was able to be extremely productive working in such a significant gathering place of information where I could learn many things and expand my network of contacts.

It was also fortunate for me that this was my second posting in Canada, and that this country is where I completed my two-years of overseas training with Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Canada is also my husband's home, so I had the advantage of being able to assume my position with considerable understanding of the locale. I feel it was very helpful that I was aware of various aspects of Canada that are normally difficult to comprehend from Japan, such as its federalism, its multicultural society, its relationship with the US, Canadian values and the history of Japanese Canadians.

I was also very lucky to encounter various historical milestones during my time here of just under three years. Starting with the reception celebrating the 50th anniversary of postwar Japanese immigration to Canada just two days after my arrival, there was also the 90th anniversary of Japan-Canada diplomatic relations, the 60th anniversary of the donation of Sakura trees to High Park, the change from the Heisei to the Reiwa era, the CPTPP entering into force and even the 50th anniversary of the sister city relationship between Lindsay,



Ontario, and my hometown of Nayoro in Hokkaido. Indeed, there is no shortage of other examples. I will also take with me wonderful memories of participating in sports-related events such as the Toronto Raptors winning the NBA championship and the subsequent Raptors Japan Day, events in Toronto commemorating the Rugby World Cup hosted in Japan and participating in the Opening and Awards Ceremonies at the Toronto Waterfront Marathon, where the Canadian representatives to the Tokyo Olympics were selected.

Under normal circumstances, I would also have celebrated the opening of the Tokyo Games with you this summer, cheering from the "Japan Village" which was to be installed at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC) as an ad hoc centre for supporting the participating athletes and for disseminating Japanese culture. However, this is one dream I must leave for my successor, due to the one-year postponement of the Olympic and Paralympic Games resulting from the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. The spread of the Novel Coronavirus, as well as our response to this emergency, proved to be immense and unprecedented challenges, and dealing with them was a source of considerable tension every day. This was by no means a pleasant experience, but it was nonetheless an opportunity to reaffirm our responsibilities as a foreign diplomatic mission toward local Japanese residents.



I also had the advantage of being able to work with many effective partners in strengthening Japan-Canada relations, such as Japanese businesses, Japanese Canadians, JET Programme alumni, The Japan Foundation, Toronto, JETRO and the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO). Despite their busy schedules, the executives of the Toronto Japanese Association of Commerce and Industry (Shokokai), kindly joined me in expressing their candid opinions, including their requests as the Japanese business community, to the Government of Ontario and local federal lawmakers. They are also making significant contributions to the local community with funds gathered through Shokokai's charity events. The Japanese Restaurants Association of Canada (JRAC) contributed greatly to the promotion of Japanese cuisine at the annual



Washoku Matsuri and at our National Day receptions. The Sake Institute of Ontario (SIO) provided invaluable support in our discussions with the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) and through various events to promote sake. The Association of Japanese Canadian Businesses and Professionals (Shinkikai), comprised of entrepreneurs who immigrated from Japan, realized the dreams of young Canadians studying Japanese by supporting the Ontario Japanese Speech Contest through its sponsorship of the “Shinkikai-Sagamihara Award”, the winners of which were invited to visit our country in collaboration with Sagamihara City, a sister city of Toronto.

We were also able to work successfully with the Centre of the Study of Global Japan – established in 2017 at the University of Toronto’s Munk School – through



its formative years to promote academic exchange between Japan and Canada by holding various seminars and symposia. As well, I would like to take this opportunity to ask the alumni of the JET Programme and the Japanese Government (MEXT) Scholarships, as well as the members of MUSUBU, which promotes networks among young Japanese

Canadian professionals and Japanese living in the Toronto area, to continue working to raise interest in Japan and to further develop exchanges between Canada and Japan at the grassroots level.

Outside of Toronto, I was deeply impressed by the number of municipalities, regional governments and other organizations in Ontario that have a long-standing relationship with Japan. They include: Mississauga, which hosted a reception in celebration of the 90th anniversary of Japan-Canada diplomatic relations and invited the attendance of Japanese businesses as well as myself; Burlington, which established Itabashi Garden incorporating both Japanese and Canadian aesthetics; and Barrie, which conducts annual student exchanges at the junior and senior high school level. I would also like to ask them and others to continue their vital work.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the JCCC. I cannot count the number of times I stepped onto its premises, where Japanese, Japanese

Canadians and people simply interested in Japan undertake a wide variety of activities promoting Japanese culture. Its New Year's Festival, Spring Festival, Summer Festival, Toronto Japanese Film Festival, ikebana exhibits, kendo tournaments, Shodo



Canada exhibits, sumi-e exhibits – the fond memories go on forever. COVID-19 has presented many challenges for the JCCC in undertaking its activities this year, but I am confident it will overcome them all to continue upholding its motto of “Friendship through Culture”.

That I was fortunately the first female Consul-General of Japan in Toronto proved useful as “promotional material” for our country’s initiatives in empowering women, as well as in building ties with the network of women in Canada. At the Royal Ontario Museum, I had the opportunity to speak in front of a distinguished



audience on the theme of women in Japan. As well, I feel my activities such as accompanying the first women’s business mission to Japan dispatched by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, attending the SheEO Summit where women support other female entrepreneurs, giving a

speech at Can150 in which women support female athletes, as well as other, similar activities, helped to build solidarity between Canadian and Japanese women. Furthermore, interacting with Japanese women working in and around Toronto also provided opportunities to encourage and inspire one another.

I was most fortunate that my staff at the Consulate-General, although small in number, were comprised of extremely capable individuals who constantly assisted me in my activities. That I was able to move effectively as the “face” of the Consulate-General of Japan is completely due to how my diplomatic and local

staff supported me from every angle. I am sure at times this demanded considerable work and effort, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of them, including former staff who have already returned to Japan or have been posted elsewhere.

My successor, Consul-General SASAYAMA Takuya, was most recently Minister at the Embassy of Japan in Ottawa, and therefore will assume his position with a wealth of knowledge and experience with respect to Canada. I would like to conclude these parting remarks by expressing my sincere wish that Japan's ties with Canada and Ontario will further flourish under Consul-General Sasayama, by thanking all of you who constantly devote tireless efforts to strengthen Japan-Canada relations and by wishing you good health and the best of luck.

Sayonara. Goodbye, Toronto. Thank you for the many, many exciting and emotional moments!