

CG Matunaga's remarks at the opening of the Foreign Minister's Commendation conferment ceremony for Ms. Constance Sugiyama on 4 July 2024

It is my great honour to have this most auspicious opportunity, as we gather here today, to pay respect to Ms. Constance Sugiyama, who was bestowed the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation.

The Foreign Minister's Commendations are awarded to individuals and groups with outstanding achievements in international fields, to acknowledge their contributions to the promotion of friendship between Japan and other countries. The Commendations also aim to promote the understanding and support of the Japanese public for the activities of the recipients.

Ms. Constance Sugiyama was awarded the Minister's Commendation for her distinguished contributions to the mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and Canada, to the development of external economic relations, and to the promotion of activities in the areas of public relations and cultural exchange.

More specifically, as a board member of the Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation from 1989 to 1993 as well as its legal advisor from 1994 to 2002, Ms. Sugiyama supported the improvement of the status of Japanese Canadians, who had been forced to endure a history of hardship during and after World War II, through the government's apology and redress agreement, as well as the implementation of the redress. The harmonious and peaceful environment that Japanese Canadians relish today in their local communities is owed to this agreement and its implementation. And in this regard, Ms. Sugiyama's contributions cannot be exaggerated.

In the 1980s, as a trusted lawyer and as an early member of the Sodan Kai, the Toronto group that organized and lobbied the federal government for an apology and redress, Ms. Sugiyama supported the progress of negotiations which culminated in the redress agreement, making meaningful contributions from a legal perspective.

After the conclusion of the agreement, Ms. Sugiyama promoted coordination with the government to facilitate its implementation. The Foundation played a critical role in dispersing the community portion of the redress settlement, which was instrumental in building the Nikkei National Heritage Centre (NNHC) also known as the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre (NNMCC) in Vancouver, as

well as in funding the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre and Momiji Seniors Centre in the Greater Toronto Area.

Furthermore, Ms. Sugiyama made a significant contribution to promoting Japan-Canada economic relations. For example, as one of the most highly regarded corporate lawyers in Canada a lawyer, Ms. Sugiyama supported, in the late 1980s and beyond, the entry of major Japanese banks into the Canadian market. In the 1990s, as a member of Prime Minister Chretien's Team Canada Trade Mission to Japan, Ms. Sugiyama represented Canadian business, meeting with Japanese counterparts. From 1992 to 2002, Ms. Sugiyama was a member of the Canada Japan Business Committee. From 1993 to 1996, she was Ontario Government Representative to the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, and currently serves as the federal appointee to the foundation. From 1994 to 2004, Ms. Sugiyama was a board member of Japan Society.

Before concluding, I would like to mention the visit of the then Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress to the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto on July 9, 2009, that was held during Their Majesties State visit to Canada. The then Her Majesty the Empress talked to the ten children who were then present in the "Reading Room" of the hospital. Like other visitors who had read to the children in this

Reading Room before, Her Majesty's talk was carried to all the children's rooms in the hospital through the in-house television. Her Majesty stated there that "Before leaving Japan it was suggested to me that in this reading room, if I could read something to you, but as I was not able to find a story short enough to finish in a limited time, I chose instead to sing for you a small Japanese cradle song." After adding that "I am afraid it is too early to become sleepy, but this is for tonight," Her Majesty sang Cradle Song written by Kitahara Hakusyu and composed by Kusakawa Shin, a lyrical lullaby known to all Japanese. This came as a beautiful surprise to all, and the visit to this one of the top pediatric research hospitals in the world, coupled with this touching episode, attracted a great deal of attention in Japan, and proved to be a resounding success. And Ms. Sugiyama was the person who hosted the then Their Majesties at this world-renowned hospital as the Chair of its Board of Trustees.

To conclude, Ms. Sugiyama, it is my magnificent pleasure to express our sincerest sense of appreciation for your outstanding contributions, both those well-known and those that are made behind the scenes, to laying the foundations for excellent bilateral relations of today and empowering so many in both Japan and Canada.

Thank you.