

CG Matsunaga's remarks at the opening of the Foreign Minister's Commendation conferment ceremony for the Sake Institute Ontario on January 30, 2025

It is my great honour to have this most auspicious opportunity, as we gather here today, to pay respect to the Sake Institute of Ontario, SIO, which 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. This time, the SIO was awarded the Minister's Commendation for its distinguished contributions to the promotion of Japanese food and sake culture in Canada, and thereby to the friendly relations between Japan and Canada. Foreign Minister Kamikawa expressed her deep respect and extended the recognition to the SIO.

As a not-for-profit trade organization of Ontario-based sake distributors and manufacturers with the principal objective of educating and promoting the

responsible consumption and enjoyment of sake, the SIO, since its establishment in February 2012, has contributed to raising awareness of Japanese alcohol, expanding sales channels, and increasing the amount of Japanese alcohol handled at the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, LCBO. I avail myself of this opportunity to pay tribute to the founders of the Institute. The Institute continues to focus on educating and increasing awareness of sake through events, seminars, content sharing both online and via social media, and of course lobbying the LCBO to promote the sale of Japanese sake.

The SIO is most visible as the organizer of Kampai Toronto, the Institute's flagship event, which is the largest sake festival in Canada, held in the Greater Toronto Area. Since the inaugural event "Kampai Toronto Festival of Sake" at the Distillery Historic District in downtown Toronto on the evening of May 31, 2012, this initiative has always been a keenly sought-after annual event where consumers, scores of brewers from Japan, Canada, and the U.S, distributors and buyers including the LCBO share, learn and connect.

As we all are aware, when importing and selling alcoholic beverages in Ontario, importers cannot import products directly from Japanese manufacturers or sell them on their own after importing. It is mandatory for them to be processed through the LCBO. Building a relationship with the LCBO is a prerequisite for promoting sake in Ontario. The SIO as well as its individual members have been continuously communicating and building ties with the LCBO in various ways, which I highly appreciate and praise. The Government of Japan will continue supporting SIO's endeavors in this regard.

While the process takes time, and challenges remain, the efforts are bearing fruits. As a result of the SIO's strenuous works in partnership with other stakeholders, the number of sake products dealt in at LCBO has increased significantly since the establishment of the Institute. It was in 2016, four years after the SIO's establishment that the LCBO began setting up permanent sections in some of its outlets specializing in East Asian products, with a focus on sake. On March 15 last year, a new LCBO East Asia Boutique was launched in its outlet #177 located at a bustling corner of North York.

He spoke about sake-making, stories of sake and impressions his visits to sake brewery houses left on him during his stay in Japan. I was pleased to note that years of works of the SIO are making positive impacts on the LCBO, including at the highest level of its leadership.

To conclude, sake has a good prospect in Ontario. To tap the potential, we can and should continue to cooperate, recalling the fact that sake-making requires many hands and strong teamwork. We can do so in many ways, including through joint initiatives as well as through reinforcing each other's initiatives. We always stand ready to cooperate.

Following its inscribing in 2013 of Washoku, traditional dietary culture of the Japanese, UNESCO last December inscribed traditional knowledge and skills of sake-making with koji mold in Japan on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. According to Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association, sake's export from Japan has nearly quadrupled in the last decade. The mastery of sake-making continues spreading and honed outside Japan too, including here in Toronto as we know well. Next month we have Sake Month with generous support of the SIO. On June 12, we cooperate with the

SIO for its “Kampai Toronto 2025” at Wychwood Barns.

Again, sake has a good prospect in Ontario. I wish every success in the SIO’s these and many other future endeavors.

Thank you.