

New Zealand Waitangi Day

New Zealand and Japan: true friendship in adversity

Ian Kennedy
Ambassador of New Zealand

I am grateful to the Japan Times for giving me this opportunity to greet New Zealanders and our friends in Japan on Feb. 6 — the day that marks the birth of modern-day New Zealand. On that day in 1840 Maori “rangatira” (“chiefs”) gathered with representatives of the British Crown to sign New Zealand’s founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi.



Waitangi Day is an opportunity for New Zealanders at home and abroad to reflect on the development of our nation since the treaty was signed, to celebrate our successes and commemorate the sacrifices that New Zealanders have made during that time. Waitangi Day also gives us the chance to celebrate our bicultural roots, what it means to be a “Kiwi,” and the role we can play in an increasingly globalized world.

In the past 12 months, New Zealand and Japan have experienced devastating natural disasters. On Feb. 22 last year, the Canterbury region of New Zealand suffered a 6.3-magnitude earthquake centered near Christchurch, New Zealand’s second-largest city. The earthquake left New Zealanders and the families and friends of 14 other nationalities mourning 182 loved ones, including 28 Japanese who lost their lives in the tragedy. Many others were injured.

Japan responded immediately by dispatching an Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team to Christchurch, including specialists from the coast guard, police and firefighting services, and sniffer dogs. Their arrival had a hugely positive impact on the people of Christchurch and was deeply appreciated by all of New Zealand. Less than three weeks later, New Zealand reciprocated by dispatching a USAR team to Japan to assist in the relief operation following the devastating

earthquake and tsunami that occurred in Tohoku on March 11, in which more than 19,000 lives were lost. The New Zealand USAR team that was sent to assist in Tohoku was the first-ever large-scale overseas deployment of New Zealand USAR personnel.

In addition to mutual assistance at the government level, the outpouring of goodwill and contributions from the business community and private individuals in both countries was truly remarkable and humbling, indicative of the “kizuna” — ties of friendship — that link Japan and New Zealand. As one example of this, immediately following the Canterbury earthquake, it was my privilege to work with a number of New Zealanders and Japanese friends to plan a charity dinner to raise money for the relief and recovery effort in Christchurch. Before we had taken this initiative very far, the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami struck, and it was natural to extend the initiative to Tohoku. Under the banner “Support our Kids,” the focus was on children, especially those who had lost a parent or had been evacuated from their homes. With generous support from a large number of companies, organizations and individuals, we succeeded in raising

funds for 50 children from high schools and universities in Tohoku to undertake home stays of three to four weeks in New Zealand. The remaining funds were donated to orphanages damaged in the Christchurch and Tohoku earthquakes. The home stays were a big success, allowing the children to relax, build new friendships and experience Kiwi culture and hospitality. Under the inspired leadership of Japanese NPO “Creative Workshop for the Next Generation,” with strong support from Save the Children Japan and other organizations, we plan to make this initiative an ongoing program.

At another level, in response to the Canterbury earthquake, on March 14, 2011, the New Zealand government announced the establishment of a Royal Commission to examine issues around the built-up environment in the Christchurch central business district in which many people, including Japanese, lost their lives. The Commission delivered an interim report on Oct. 10, and a final report is due by April 11 this year. Separately, in March three Japanese professors (all specialists in the area of disaster management) from Tohoku, Tokyo and Kyoto universities will visit New Zealand to share ideas

and discuss solutions to the seismic-related problems that our two countries face. Backed by Japanese and New Zealand government funding, it is hoped that New Zealand scientists will also visit Japan later this year. Practical cooperation like this, in all spheres, underpins the strong bilateral relationship.

While remembering the difficulties of the past year, it is important that we also celebrate our successes and grasp the opportunities before us, particularly in this 60th anniversary year of diplomatic relations between New Zealand and Japan. Sports have always had a special place in the hearts and minds of New Zealanders and Japanese. The victory by Nadeshiko Japan in the FIFA World Cup Women’s Soccer tournament was not only a wonderful achievement, but also a tonic for the nation. In the same way, all of New Zealand took great pride in the achievement of the All Blacks in winning the Rugby World Cup held in New Zealand last year. Promoted as a “stadium of 4 million people,” the country united in welcoming over 133,000 visitors from around the world. The tournament was an opportunity also to showcase New Zealand as a vibrant, outward-looking,

modern democracy with excellent communication networks and transport links globally, a great place to do business and a great place to relax, combining fantastic food, wine, world-class hospitality and lodges, along with some of the most beautiful natural scenery in the world. With Japan due to host the Rugby World Cup in 2019, New Zealand stands ready to share our experience with the Japanese Rugby Football Union in their preparations and planning.

New Zealand has long been a proponent of liberal free-trading systems, working multilaterally through the WTO as well as regionally and bilaterally with our key trading partners. Reflecting the importance of Japan to New Zealand, we have also sought to engage in a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) as a win/win proposition for both countries, with Japan well-positioned to supply high-quality manufactured goods and electronic products to New Zealand, and New Zealand well-positioned to supply high-quality, clean, safe

foodstuffs that meet the needs of Japanese consumers. New Zealand has also warmly welcomed Japan’s interest in joining the negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). Having Japan join TPP, a group of nine Pacific Rim countries committed to free trade and closer integration of Asia-Pacific economies, would be of immense significance and benefit to our two countries.

Tourism is another area of the bilateral relationship that we are keen to see expand further. As the home of Middle-Earth, and linked to Japan by the Pacific Ocean, New Zealand offers a holiday destination with a difference, with a unique and welcoming culture making for an enjoyable and memorable experience. Following the Canterbury and Tohoku earthquakes, it is pleasing that Air New Zealand has returned to operating charter flights from Nagoya, Fukuoka and Kagoshima in addition to its normal scheduled services. The new code-share arrangement between Air New Zealand and



Support our kids: Ambassador Ian Kennedy and embassy staff welcome children from Tohoku, whose hometowns were hit by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, to a “kiwi barbecue” at the New Zealand Embassy in Tokyo on Nov. 26. NEW ZEALAND EMBASSY

ANA, which comes into effect in March, will also bring New Zealand and Japan closer together by providing travellers on both airlines with improved access to domestic destinations in New Zealand, Japan and beyond to Europe, Asia, Australia and the Pacific.

No survey of Japan-New Zealand relations would be complete without acknowledging

the ongoing commitment and valuable contribution made by the network of sister cities and friendship societies in both countries, the long-standing JET program, and, more recently, the JENESYS Future Business Leaders and Special Fields Counterparts program funded generously by Japan. In a very real sense, these activities underpin the “Kiwi diaspora” in Japan.

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