Opening Remarks to


Tom Connor, the Charge d’Affairs of the Australian Embassy Tokyo

Acknowledgements:

- Sugimura-Fuku gakucho; Sophia University
- Mr Hiroyuki Nii of the Resona Foundation for Asia and Oceania,
- Professor Fukushima, President of ASAJ
- Ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for having me today.

My name is Tom Connor and I am the Charge d’Affaires of the Australian Embassy Tokyo.

I am delighted to be here at The 2014 International Conference of the Australian Studies Association of Japan. I attended last year’s National Conference in Nagoya which was also a great pleasure.

I understand that this year marks the 25th anniversary since the founding of ASAJ in 1989. I would like to extend my congratulations to everyone here today on the long lasting contribution you have made to the Australia-Japan relationship and Australian studies here in Japan.

I am pleased to hear that this year we have scholars from all over the world participating in this conference. I think you will agree with me when I say, that this conference comes at a very propitious time in the Australia-Japan relationship.

ASAJ Conference

The Australian government is very interested in the work of the ASAJ and we’re very happy to be able to help support this event today through the Australia-Japan Foundation. AJF Board Members and International Australian Studies Association Vice President Kate Darian-Smith is also here today and will be a panellist this afternoon.

From the Embassy’s point of view, the Association plays an important role in deepening the mutual understanding between our two countries, in particular by encouraging young Japanese students to focus on Australian Studies.

The visiting professor program at the University of Tokyo is one of the core activities of the Australia-Japan Foundation. Associate Professor Catriona Elder from University of Sydney is our current Visiting Professor at Todai and she will also be a panellist later today.
As our countries grow ever closer diplomatically, it is crucial that young people are exposed to studies of Australia, and our shared values and interests, from prominent Australians like Professor Elder. I had the opportunity to hear Professor Elder speak earlier this month at the Embassy when she spoke about Australian Indigenous peoples and identity to celebrate NAIDOC Week.

Unfortunately, Professor Elder will be heading home to Australia early next month. I would like to thank her for the excellent contribution she has made to Australian Studies in Japan. I am also pleased to say we have confirmed the appointment of the next visiting professor - Associate Professor Anna Johnston from the University of Tasmania whom I understand is here with us today. Associate Professor Johnston is the Director of the Centre for Colonialism and Its Aftermath at the University of Tasmania. Her area of research is literary studies, and she has substantial experience in the fields of colonial and postcolonial studies.

She will commence her position in October 2014. We look forward to a very fruitful collaboration with her later this year.

**Current Australia-Japan connections**

As most of you are aware, Prime Minister Abe visited Australia earlier this month following Prime Minister Abbott’s visit to Tokyo in April.

He visited Canberra, Sydney and the mining region vitally important to Japan’s prosperity, the Pilbara. It has been the first bilateral visit to Australia by a Japanese Prime Minister since former Prime Minister Koizumi in 2002.

One of the highlights of his visit was the Address Prime Minister Abe gave to both houses of the Australian Parliament. This is a rare honour and a demonstration of the high regard Prime Minister Abbott has for Prime Minister Abe and of the bilateral relationship.

Prime Minister Abe’s address was given in fluent English and touched the hearts of many Australians.

The signing of the Japan Australia Economic Partnership Agreement (JAEPA) was at the heart of Prime Minister Abe’s visit. This was a historic step in our bilateral relationship in our business ties, and in Japan’s trade policy. The JAEPA will allow the bilateral economic relationship to move to the next level, in the same way that the 1957 bilateral Commerce Agreement fundamentally elevated the business relationship from its previous level.

The Australian Government also wishes to enhance our security and defence relations with Japan.

The 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministers framework set in train in 2007 continues to be an important opportunity for us to exchange views on our changing region, and to agree concrete measures that facilitate our strategic and defence cooperation.

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The fifth 2+2 meeting held in June advanced the relationship in a number of areas. I am confident in saying that the meeting fulfilled the task leaders set ministers of elevating the bilateral security and defence relationship to a new level.

Furthermore Our two Prime Ministers signed an agreement to deepen defence science, technology and materiel cooperation between the two countries during Prime Minister Abe’s visit, arrangement reconfirms the shared values and interests in the Australia-Japan defence relationship.

People to People Links
While our security and defence and trade and economic relationships are of importance to both our countries, I believe the real strength in our relationship lies in the links between our two peoples.

There are 106 sister city or sister region relationships between Australia and Japan. Japan-Australia Societies are active throughout Japan. The same is true in Australia.

In education, tens of thousands of students travel in both directions every year, on school exchanges or on student visas.

Indeed, Foreign Minister Bishop while visiting Keio University in June suggested that she could think of no better way for the Australia-Japan relationship to flourish and endure, than to invest in our young people, and to give our young people the opportunity to live and study in our respective countries.

Australia and Japan have more than 650 established sister-school relationships and over 400 partnership agreements between Australian and Japanese universities.

Japanese is the most widely-studied foreign language in Australia’s schools and universities. We are fourth in the world – 275,000 Australian students from primary to tertiary study Japanese.

Australia is continuing to take student exchange between Australia and Japan to a new level with our “New Colombo Plan”.

Because we believe so passionately in the benefits of student exchange, the Australian Government is providing scholarships for Australian students to study at universities in the Asia-Pacific.

Under the New Colombo Plan, we plan to send young Australians to study at universities and undertake internships in the region, to foster stronger people-to-people and institutional links and develop the knowledge and skills that will be in demand in the decades ahead.

The Japan pilot program was officially launched by Prime Minister Abbott and Education Minister Shimomura here in Tokyo in April.
At that launch, Prime Minister Abbott announced that the highest achieving scholar each year would be named a Kishi Fellow in honour of Mr Abe’s grandfather Mr Kishi who was prime minister in 1957 at the time the Australia-Japan Commerce Treaty was signed.

This year, over 400 Australian students will have an opportunity to study at universities in Japan. The aim is for Australian students to come to study and work in Japan – to learn the language, understand the culture, the people, the politics – and then go back to Australia with new perspectives, insights and ideas about the Australia-Japan relationship. We are very grateful to the Japanese business community for its support of this program.

Importantly, our intention to send more young Australians to Japan dovetails with Prime Minister Abe’s aim to internationalise Japanese education, by doubling the number of Japanese students studying abroad, as well as the number of international students in Japan by 2020.

Closing
In closing, I’d like to thank you again for the invitation to join you today.

I’d like also to extend my gratitude to Professor Suzuki for his leadership in hosting this conference at his university this year.

My thanks, too, for the contributions to academic exchange between our countries that all of you present are making today, and will continue to make in the future. Congratulations again on the 25th anniversary of the association and I look forward to celebrating many more anniversaries to come.

Thank you.