Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

Before getting into the subject, I would like to thank the organizers of this conference which gives me the honour to speak here today among such distinguished company. This conference is a wonderful opportunity for academics, government representatives and business leaders to share their knowledge and strengthen the bonds between our two countries.

On 28 April 1952, with the entry into force of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, diplomatic relations were established between Japan and New Zealand. In the same year New Zealand established a diplomatic mission in Tokyo as her first diplomatic mission in Asia, and Japan opened her mission in Wellington the following year. Since then, we have maintained excellent relations, and our relationship now extends to economics, culture, politics and regional and international fields.

In our political relationship, Japan and New Zealand are invaluable partners in the Asia-Pacific region, with shared fundamental values for democracy, and the desire to maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. We have strengthened our cooperation through regional frameworks such as APEC and EAS. Furthermore, in recent years, our close cooperation has extended to development assistance in Afghanistan and the Pacific Islands.

Our two countries also have strong economic and trade relationships. Japan has been a significant investor in the New Zealand economy and has been one of the most important trading partners since early 1960s. Japan now is the 4th largest investor and trading partner for New Zealand. In November last year, Prime Minister Noda announced at the APEC meeting in Honolulu that Japan would enter into consultation toward participating in the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations with the TPP countries including New Zealand. I understand the TPP negotiations stared yesterday here in
Auckland but, as you know, Japan is not participating yet in the negotiations.

We look forward to seeing developments and strong political leadership after the general election to be held on 16th of this month.

Now, I would like to talk about our people-to-people relations as I believe this is the basis for our strong and friendly relationship in the past and in the future to come.

Although 2012 marks the 60th anniversary of our diplomatic relationship, the connection between Japan and New Zealand dates back much further than the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1952. Right from the very beginning people-to-people connections have served as the foundation for our relationship. The first Japanese emigrant to New Zealand was Asajiro “Tommy” Noda, the son of a Nagasaki shipbuilder who arrived in Bluff in 1890, married a Maori woman and had five children. One of Mr Noda’s descendents lived in Auckland and he attended our Emperor’s birthday party celebration two years ago.

Dr Isamu Kawase of Nishinomiya came to New Zealand to study agriculture at Christchurch’s Lincoln College, now Lincoln University, in 1931. He is regarded as New Zealand’s first Japanese student. He loved New Zealand and continued to visit Christchurch for the rest of his life. He was the patron to Christchurch’s Festival of Japan and was named as an Honorary Member of the Queen’s Service Order in 1979.

In 1936, the New Zealand universities rugby team toured Japan marking the start of a long and impressive history of rugby relations between us. Many Japanese came to New Zealand last year for the 2011 Rugby World Cup and I am sure many New Zealanders will visit Japan for the 2019 Rugby World Cup.

In recent years, several organisations have taken a large role in promoting our relationship here in New Zealand.

The New Zealand Japan Society was established in 1960 and it has played an important role in bringing Japanese activities to New Zealand such as Taiko drumming and tea ceremonies. The New Zealand Japan Society holds an annual festival named Taste of Japan, and this year, it was held in October at the Auckland Museum in celebration of our 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

The Japanese Society of Auckland was established in 1989. The Society supports the Japanese community in Auckland and organises many events to bring Japanese culture to New Zealand. The biggest of the events is its annual Japan Day festival. This year it was held in February in celebration of our 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations with more than 40,000 Aucklanders enjoying the event.

The Japan New Zealand Business Council was established in 1974 to foster and develop trade relations between our two countries. The JNZBC held its 39th Annual Conference successfully here in Auckland just last month. The Conference was fortunate to have Prime Minister John Key as a guest speaker. He spoke about our strong relationship, the Trans Pacific Partnership, and mentioned his short visit to the tsunami and quake damaged area of Tohoku as part of his visit to Japan in September to mark our 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

It is thanks to groups such as these, and their individual members, that New Zealand and Japan have such a strong relationship. Therefore it is most fitting to end our 60th anniversary year by
commending these three organisations for their contribution to the strong ties between our nations. I am pleased to announce that these three organisations will be awarded the Japanese Foreign Minister’s Commendation at the Emperor’s birthday reception on December 7th this Friday.

In order to nurture links between young people, the Japanese government has established several programmes such as the JET Programme, the JENESYS Programme and the Monbukagakusho Japanese government scholarships.

The JET programme sends New Zealand graduates to Japan to assist with English language teaching. New Zealand was one of the four original participating countries when the programme was founded in 1987. Over 2,600 New Zealanders have taken part in this programme, which is now in its 26th year, teaching in schools all over Japan. This is not only a chance for these participants to learn about Japan, but an opportunity to teach the people of Japan about New Zealand. Of course, they form personal bonds with Japan that last a lifetime. On returning to New Zealand, these participants bring Japanese culture back with them and share this with others through organisations such as the JET alumni association.

The Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths, or the JENESYS Programme has been running for the past 5 years. The programme, which was first announced at the East Asia Summit in 2007, has brought young people of EAS member states from a range of different fields to visit Japan in an aim to promote mutual understanding. Students, teachers, young leaders, and artists have had the opportunity to visit Japan under this programme. A total of 330 New Zealand youth went to Japan under this programme as business counterparts and agriculture counterparts. These young people met with their counterparts in Japan and have since formed a substantial number of the yJNZBC, the Youth Advisory Council of the Japan New Zealand Business Council, members, to become young leaders in the business and agricultural fields to connect our two countries.

The Japanese Ministry of Education offers scholarships to foreign students who wish to study at Japanese universities. To date, some 83,000 students from approximately 160 countries and regions around the world have studied in Japan under this programme established in 1954. As of May 1, 2009, there were 10,168 foreign students studying in Japan as Japanese government scholarship students. In the last 10 years approximately 75 students from New Zealand went to Japan under this programme. It is wonderful that many of these students return to their home countries to utilize their knowledge and skills, bringing their experience in Japan back with them.

In addition to these programmes there are many young people on working holidays in each country. The Working Holiday Agreement was put into force in 1985 and since then more than ten thousand New Zealanders have gone to Japan, while in the last five years about ten thousand Japanese have come to New Zealand.

Japan and New Zealand also share the valuable diplomatic asset of 42 sister city relationships, which present an excellent platform for grass-roots level exchanges between our countries. These relationships are initiated and kept alive by the work of individuals, whether it is in the form of educational or cultural exchange or trade.

Language study is another important aspect of people-to-people relations. Many young Japanese come to New Zealand to study English. Many more Japanese students come to New Zealand on
school trips or educational trips to have a taste of English in this country's safe and beautiful environment. In the year 2010, 122 public and private Japanese schools brought 4,867 students to New Zealand on these trips. This number seems to be increasing.

In New Zealand, Japanese language is widely taught in schools and many New Zealanders are interested in Japanese language together with its unique culture. You can feel this with the many Sushi shops in Auckland. As of the year 2011, Japanese language is taught in more than 2,500 high schools, colleges and primary schools in New Zealand approximately 23,600 students studying the language.

The earthquakes which New Zealand and Japan experienced in 2011 served to strengthen the bonds we have. About 39 hours after the Canterbury earthquake, 66 rescuers arrived in New Zealand as the first of three groups from Japan to assist with search and rescue. Following the Great East Japan earthquake a New Zealand Urban Search and Rescue team went to Japan to assist in Minami-sanriku, one of the most devastated regions, despite the fact that Canterbury was still working to recover from its own disaster.

After the Canterbury earthquake, Japan presented $500,000 US dollars to the New Zealand Red Cross, and after the Tohoku earthquake New Zealand gave $1 million New Zealand dollars to the Japanese Red Cross. However, it was the grassroots actions of individuals in the two countries that really made the difference.

At this difficult time, New Zealanders and Japanese reached out to provide material and financial assistance. Individuals and groups here in New Zealand organised fund-raising events including benefit concerts, charity breakfasts, dinners and bake sales for which we are very thankful and impressed.

I would like to conclude by reiterating that it is indeed people and individuals like all of you present here today who have built the friendly and strong relationship between our two countries. As we are celebrating our 60th anniversary, I feel confident that our efforts are nurturing young people who will become the next generation to maintain our strong relationship over the next sixty years and more to come.

Thank you.