

Remarks by Consul General, Ken Okaniwa, on the occasion of the reception to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty, The Emperor of Japan

December 8, 2015

Doral City Mayor Boria, distinguished guests,

Before I begin, I would like to express our heartfelt condolences and sympathy regarding the barbaric terrorist attack that occurred in San Bernardino on December 2. We strongly condemn this act and will continue to work with the US and others to fight terrorism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

May I first express my sincere appreciation for gathering today to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. This is his 82nd birthday.

This year also marked the 70th year since the end of the World War II. Taking this opportunity, the Emperor and the Empress visited the Pacific island state of Palau, the site of fierce combat between the Japanese and the American forces. During their visit, their Majesties consoled the spirits of both the Japanese and the American victims. As the Emperor remarked at the time, we must never forget that there was such a tragic history.

The history of US-Japan relations during the last 70 years is a model of reconciliation. Today, common values, strong friendship and an unshakable alliance binds the two countries. The visit of Prime Minister Abe to DC in April highlighted the fruitful global partnership covering security, economy and other sectors.

My task is to build upon such momentum in the State of Florida. Currently, Japan is #1 investor in Florida in terms of property, plant and equipment. About 200 Japanese companies operate in the State contributing to more than 20,000 jobs. These companies also support the local community. For example, I visited Fort Lauderdale to visit Sato Global Solutions the other

day and the company supports a group that helps people with disabilities. We will continue to support Japanese companies in the area as well as to entice newcomers to this vibrant State.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Florida has ten sister regional government relationships with Japan. Just a few weeks ago, Mayor Regalado visited Kagoshima City to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their sister-city relationship. Clearwater and Nagano City celebrated their 55th anniversary by exchanging missions to the respective cities this year. Delray City has a sister city relationship with Miyazu City because people from the Japanese city came as pioneer farmers in the early 1900s. The land donated by a former pioneer, Mr. Morikami, is now the site of a museum and a fabulous garden in his name, actively promoting Japanese culture in Palm Beach. We will continue to support such precious links between Florida and Japan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If you do not know what manga or cosplay is, you are not keeping up with the times. These days many young people, including those in Florida, are interested in Japanese pop culture. In response to this trend, Japanese language courses are offered at 22 schools and colleges in the State. In the same vein, 46 graduates from Florida were sent to Japan to participate in the JET Program, one of the most successful exchange program for foreigners to teach English in Japan. We would like to continue to promote Japan to the younger generations.

Perhaps less known is the existence of US servicemen and women who were stationed in Japan. The Consulate is cultivating relations with such people who continue to have fond memories of Japan.

Let me take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all those who have contributed to the friendly relations between Florida and Japan.

Having discussed with many people prior to and after my arrival in Miami, there is still a lot of work to be done. To most Japanese, the image of Florida is Disney World. They are surprised to learn Florida is the 3rd largest State in terms of the economy. On the other hand, many Floridians are not fully aware of how important Japan is for them in various respects such as public transport, climate change and culture.

On a personal note, I am very grateful for the warm welcome since my arrival. I am thrilled to be posted to Florida at this time as we anticipate the Presidential elections and the expansion of the Panama Canal. I was also very honoured to attend the oath of office ceremony of our local Commissioner Ken Russell, probably the first Japanese American to be elected to public office in the State. I look forward to working together with all of you to promote friendship between Japan and Florida.