

Speech by the Ambassador of Japan to Malaysia

H.E. Mr. OKA Hiroshi

At the Reception to Celebrate the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan

On Tuesday, 25th February 2020

At Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort and Spa, Kota Kinabalu

It is with great honour and pleasure that we host this reception to celebrate the 60th birthday of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito of Japan, who came to the throne on May 1st last year as the 126th Emperor of Japan, and this is his first birthday celebration in the new Reiwa era that started with his enthronement.

This is indeed my first visit to Sabah. Although my stay here is very much short, I have already been fascinated by the warm hospitality of Sabahans and captivated by the beauty of nature in Sabah. I am greatly honoured and humbled to see so many leading figures at this reception tonight. Excellencies, please accept again our sincere appreciation for your attendance.

Since my arrival to Malaysia in November last year, I have witnessed many visible footprints of cooperation between Japan and Malaysia built on a firm bond of friendship since the independence of Malaysia.

Education and human capacity development is the priority area of our cooperation. Our contribution to the compilation of the Sabah Biodiversity Strategy is the case in point. It would be quite natural and fitting to start talking about environment for the topic of cooperation between Japan and State of Sabah in the light of the unrivalled rich reservoir of beauty in Sabah. Japan has been contributing to biodiversity in Sabah over 14 years through JICA's technical cooperation scheme and this strategy continues to be the

platform for further cooperation between Japan and the State of Sabah for the conservation of Bornean biodiversity and ecosystem.

Thanks to the Look East Policy inaugurated in 1982 and re-energized in 2018 both by Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir, more than 17,000 Malaysians have acquired opportunities for higher education and training in Japan. Language is the key for mutual understanding. We support the Japanese language education in Sabah through sending language teaching staff.

In addition, more than 1,400 Japanese businesses are operating in Malaysia and over 30 over Japanese companies are in Sabah. We are grateful to the State of Sabah for its efforts to explore further business opportunities between Japan and the State of Sabah. Through technical transfer, Japan supports for Malaysia to develop itself into a more knowledge based economy through cooperating with the Industry 4.0 initiative as well as Shared Prosperity Vision 2030.

Maritime safety is also an area of priority cooperation. It is in everybody's interest that the free and safe passage of the Straits of Malacca and the adjacent areas is ensured. As a beneficiary of freedom of navigation there, Japan has worked for more than 50 years with Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia to contribute to the safety of navigation, and supported the function of MMEA (Malaysian Coast Guard) since its establishment in 2005 through providing assets and supporting human capacity developments. In fact, provision of two patrol vessels to MMEA in 2017 as grant aid from Japan is a part of such cooperation, and here Kota Kinabalu is the home port of "Arau", one of the two vessels. We are extremely happy to see "Arau" playing a crucial role for maritime safety.

Malaysia is the linchpin between the two Oceans, the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, and Japan supports to enhance the connectivity within Malaysia and beyond under the overarching Free and Open Indo Pacific vision by promoting human connectivity through

education and human capacity development, maritime connectivity through contributing safety of navigation and physical connectivity through quality infrastructure development.

Year 2020 is important for both Malaysia and Japan. Japan will provide its full support to the Chairmanship of Malaysia to lead the APEC process aiming at a new VISION for APEC post 2020. We look forward to the successful APEC trade ministers meeting here in Sabah in April.

For Japan, torch of summer Olympic will return to Tokyo this summer for the first time in 56 years. We are happy to see steady increase in tourists visits in both ways between Japan and Malaysia. For the first time, Malaysian tourists visiting Japan exceeded half million last year. We will offer more pleasant discoveries in Japan, including more opportunities to enjoy Halal food. We strongly support “Visit Malaysia 2020” and support the aspiration to double the Japanese tourists coming to Sabah. I am convinced that the combination of pristine natural environment here and the warm hospitality of the Sabahans will make Sabah the natural destination for more Japanese tourists.

Tonight Sabah-based Japanese travel agents has been introducing some tips for your next trip to Japan and JICA volunteers are here to exhibit their cooperation on human capacity developments. I wish you enjoy those presentation together with savory Japanese dishes.

Before closing my speech, I would like to thank again H.E. Sabah Head of State and all the guests for your kind attendance. Please enjoy your evening. Sekian, terima kasih.