

EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY
REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR KUSAKA
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11TH

Thank you very much, Mr. Perez and his wife, Ms. Morikawa, for the beautiful songs. What a wonderful performance by a lovely couple!

[ADDRESSEES:]

Good evening, and welcome, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I sincerely thank you for coming together for the celebration of the National Day of Japan, the Emperor's birthday.

On December 23rd, His Majesty Emperor Akihito becomes 81 years of age, and both Their Majesties, the Emperor and Empress, have remained very healthy and active. In April, Their Majesties received President Obama at the Imperial Palace and in July, Their Majesties visited **Miyagi** Prefecture which had been greatly damaged by the March 11th, 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Their Majesties offered encouragement and empathy to the survivors who are rebuilding their lives.

The three affected prefectures of **Miyagi**, **Fukushima** and **Iwate** of the **Tohoku** region are making progress in their recovery, thanks to the encouragement and helping hands of the United States and the wider world.

Today, I'd like to show you the most successful efforts in regional revitalization ranging from Tohoku, Hokuriku and Niigata to Tokyo. The current Abe Administration has made "regional revitalization" an

important feature of “**Abenomics.**” And the two-year period of “Abenomics” has produced significant progress. Results have included:

- the creation of **one million** new jobs
- a rise in salaries – by more than **2%** this spring alone
- a 17-year record low unemployment rate of 3.5%
- a **record high** in corporate profits
- a record high of over 11 million foreign travelers to Japan this year
- as well as “**Womenomics**” to improve the roles of women in the workplace and society.

So, together with the fact that Tokyo will host the 2020 Olympics, the mindset of the Japanese has been given a positive boost despite an unexpectedly sharp decline in GDP in very recent months.

One major challenge faced now is how to spread this positive trend throughout rural Japan. Thus, we have taken this opportunity today to introduce you to the more distinct and beautiful sides of the affected regions and the scenic Hokuriku region and Niigata Prefecture. Japan is not all about Tokyo, and I think American seasonal travelers will enjoy exploring rural Japan. I myself come from western Japan and my wife, Ikuko, comes from northern Japan so we can guarantee that.

So I hope you enjoyed the booths displaying the very best of the Tohoku and Hokuriku regions, as well as Niigata and Tokyo, which all offer distinct traditional crafts and cuisine, including sake and rice and lacquerware.

And the new Bullet Train - the **Hokuriku Shinkansen** of **JR East** – there is a model to my right - will help you reach the Hokuriku region quite easily and visit the beautiful UNESCO World Heritage sites it boasts.

For these wonderful exhibitions highlighting the revitalized regions of Japan, I extend my deep gratitude to those who brought us each one.

Next year will mark the 70th anniversary of the **end** of the bitter war fought by the U.S. and Japan. Since that time, they have become one of each other's closest allies. Our bilateral relationship is now based upon mutual trust, a shared vision and shared values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law and a free market economy.

I firmly believe that the U.S.-Japan Alliance is strong in spirit, the cornerstone for stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. But what makes this possible is ongoing engagement and cooperation on all levels.

All of you here today are **key** to the continued strengthening of the valued relationship between Japan and the U.S., and we at the Consulate look forward to working with you in the new year.

Thank you for your great friendship and thank you for having come here today.