

## **Consul General Okada's Message on the Occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday**

### **1. Introduction**

Hello to all of you joining us throughout the Midwest. I would like to deliver my message on the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's 61st birthday on February 23rd. We have held a reception every year to celebrate His Majesty's birthday, but this year we have decided to do it virtually given the covid-19 pandemic.

The New Year address by His Majesty the Emperor of Japan usually takes place January 2<sup>nd</sup>. But, this year Their Majesties released a video message on New Year's Day. In the message, His Majesty expressed a deep respect for all the people involved in health care, including doctors and nurses, who have been devoting themselves to medical activities in order to save the lives of many patients.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my most sincere condolences to all of the families and loved ones who have lost someone to the coronavirus, as well as my heartfelt sympathies to all those who have been impacted adversely by the pandemic. At the same time, to all those at the forefront, including our first responders, you have my deepest respect and gratitude.

### **2. Japan- U.S. Relationship in 2020**

Despite a series of challenges and difficulties we faced in 2020 and continue to face now, we were able to successfully promote our bilateral relationship on various aspects thanks to the dedication shown by so many.

Last year, His Majesty the Emperor of Japan conferred the Order of the Rising Sun upon 3 distinguished Midwesterners and the Order of the Sacred Treasure upon 2 esteemed professors for their extraordinary contributions to the partnership between Japan and the U.S. The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon was conferred upon Mr. George J. Behringer, former Honorary Consul General of Japan in Omaha. The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette was conferred upon

Mr. Richard E. Stahl, former Honorary Consul of Japan in Minneapolis. The Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays was conferred upon Mr. James Allen McClung, Director of the Japan America Society of Chicago. The Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon was conferred upon Dr. Naomi Hanaoka McGloin, Professor-Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and upon Dr. Emiko Ohnuki, William F. Vilas Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

On the economic front, virtual interactions were successfully promoted. For example, the city of Chicago, World Business Chicago, and the city of Osaka co-hosted the “Chicago-Osaka Innovation Summit” virtually last November. Likewise, we worked closely with states and communities throughout the Midwest, with the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), with Japanese companies, and with others to discuss future collaborations.

On the cultural front, many organizations and individuals devoted themselves to organizing numerous online events that brought people together virtually. I personally attended a variety of events related to Japanese culture, Japanese language education, and sister-city relationships in the Midwest. I was very encouraged and impressed by the creativity of the host organizations in continuing our cultural exchange.

Over the last year, I was also very glad to see the outstanding performances of Japanese athletes in the Midwest. Mr. Takuma Sato, a professional racing driver, won the Indianapolis 500 for a second time last August. Mr. Yu Darvish, a former Chicago Cubs pitcher, became the first Japanese pitcher to lead the MLB in wins last year. Mr. Yu Darvish and Mr. Kenta Maeda of the Minnesota Twins both became a member of the All MLB team of 2020.

### 3. Toward the Future

We will continue to work even more closely with JETRO, the Japanese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Japan America Societies, Sister City associations, Japanese American organizations, Nihonjinkai, Japanese language and supplementary schools and JET Alumni Association to promote the relationship between the U.S. and Japan. We

also have many exciting, upcoming events, including the Midwest U.S.-Japan 52nd Anniversary Conference here in Chicago this year as well as Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. I am really pleased that just 4 days ago the G7 Leaders' Statement supported Japan's commitment to hold Olympic and Paralympic in Tokyo this year as a symbol of global unity in overcoming Covid-19..

I also truly appreciate President Biden's recent statement on the Day of Remembrance of Japanese American Internment which reaffirmed the formal apology of the Federal Government to Japanese Americans for the suffering.

#### 4. Closing

As Japan and the United States share the fundamental values, I strongly believe that both countries will work together to make the world better. For example, two countries can cooperate on issues like global economy, pandemic, climate change and security issues. I believe Japan-U.S. alliance will continue to be the cornerstone for the prosperity and the peace in the region.

In closing, on the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's birthday, I wish for the friendship and goodwill between Japan and the Midwest to remain strong for many years to come, and I wish you good health and prosperity. Thank you.