

Speech of Ambassador Koji Haneda
On the occasion of the
84th Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan

December 6, 2017
Ambassador's Residence

Secretary of Transportation, Arthur Tugade,
Secretary of Public Works and Highways, Mark Villar,
Senator, Franklin Drilon,
Mayor, Lani Cayetano,
Assistant Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Millecent Cruz- Paredes,
Excellencies, Colleagues of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening, everyone.
Magandang gabi po.
[Good evening.]

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to welcome all of you as we celebrate the 84th birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. I am very much delighted tonight not just because it's my first time to host this reception, but also because I feel like hosting a homecoming celebration. I have fond memories of the Philippines back when I started my diplomatic career in Manila in the early 1980s. Now I know well how it feels like to be a "balikbayan" in my second home.

I am very fortunate to come back and serve as Ambassador at a time when Japan-Philippines relations have never been better. Building on past achievements and aiming for higher goals, I could not agree more when President Duterte recently stated in Tokyo that our two countries are entering a "Golden Age of Strategic Partnership".

This year has been an eventful and significant one for the Japan-Philippines relations. For the Philippines, this year's culminating event was of course the ASEAN-related Summits held last month where President Duterte superbly chaired the meetings. I would like to extend our sincerest congratulations to the Philippines for the enormous success of the Summits.

For Japan, on the other hand, equally enthusiastic about our much strengthened ties, Prime Minister Abe visited the Philippines twice this year. He was the first foreign leader to visit President Duterte's private residence in Davao City, where he received such an exuberant welcome. I'm told that it was indeed a very "rock star reception". Prime Minister Abe's pledge made during that visit - a five-year economic package worth one trillion yen, or 450 billion pesos - has been steadily implemented. Highlights include the North-South Commuter Railway Project, as well as the flagship Metro Manila Subway Project, which is the first of its kind to be built in the Philippines. We stand ready to support the Build, Build, Build Program of President Duterte.

Moreover, we will continue to support the Philippines in Mindanao peace and development, including Marawi rehabilitation and reconstruction. We will also cooperate with the Philippines in enhancing its maritime security capabilities and counterterrorism efforts. I myself have recently turned over patrol and high-speed vessels and patrol cars to the Philippine Coast Guard and the Philippine National Police respectively.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe the core strength of our bilateral relations lies in our people. Our people-to-people exchanges have been very evident in the past years through employment, education, cultural events, and more so in tourism. Last year, as many as 350 thousand Filipinos visited Japan, while 535 thousand Japanese came to the Philippines. To our delight, the figures will likely be exceeded this year. These grass-roots exchanges will surely help deepen mutual understanding between our people.

Perhaps we don't need to look far. Your very presence here tonight reflects the deep-rooted friendship shared by our people. I am determined to do my best to work closely with the government and people of the Philippines to further promote this "Golden Age of our Strategic Partnership".

On that note, I would like to propose a toast to the good health of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan and President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, and to an enduring and ever-growing friendship between Japan and the Philippines,

Please join me.

Kanpai ! (Mabuhay !)