

Thank you for inviting me today.

Before I begin, I would like to thank Monash University for hosting this contest online again, and the members of the Japanese Language Speech Contest Victoria Committee and sponsors for helping to make the contest happen. In particular, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Committee, which is currently chaired by Mr Hiroshi Honda, for being named as a recipient of this year's Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation. Decades of hard work and dedication running speech contest annually in Victoria by past and present members of the Committee are recognized by this commendation. おめでとうございます。

Now to all the contestants today, I would like to commend all of you for the effort you put in to studying Japanese.

Today's speech contest provides an opportunity for you to improve your language and public speaking skills and to present your original ideas in Japanese. Last year was my first year of attending a speech contest and listening to everyone's speeches. I was very impressed by the contestants' high Japanese language capabilities as well as their deep understanding of Japanese culture. I was fascinated to learn about their keen interests in literature, traditional music, history, and the advanced technologies of Japan, as well as their life stories.

これから始まる皆さんのスピーチを聞くのを楽しみにしています。出場者全員がベストを尽くせることを願っていますが、最も重要なことは皆さんが日本語の学習を続けられること、そして出来れば日本で学べることです。日本に留学出来る機会はたくさんあります。

I am looking forward to listening to today's speeches and hopefully all the contestants can do their best today but most importantly, they will be able to continue studying Japanese, possibly in Japan. There are so many opportunities to study in Japan - the Japanese government's MEXT scholarships, the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan, and individual universities' exchange programs, to name a few. For those who have already graduated from universities, you might want to apply for the Japanese government's JET programme to live and work in Japan for at least one year and up to 5 years. Internship opportunities will also be provided to today's contestants by the participating companies of

the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Melbourne, today's Contest supporter. I hope you will be able to seize these opportunities to go and stay in Japan and continue to be actively involved in the Japan-Australia relationship in future.

Today's Japan-Australia relationship has never been closer and stronger as evidenced by our growing economic, security, diplomatic and cultural ties. In particular, our new energy partnerships are rapidly growing in number, especially those focused on the production and transportation of hydrogen for domestic and export markets. In Victoria, the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project successfully kicked off earlier this year, which involves much more cross-cultural and collective working skills in both workforces in Japan and Australia. Speaking of hydrogen, I have been pleased to see growing interest in Japanese hydrogen vehicle, Toyota's Mirai II, from members of parliament, business leaders, and the general public. There are now more than 10 Mirai II vehicles here in Victoria. The opportunity for both Japanese and Australians to work in partnership in new renewable energy is certainly growing. We hope that our bilateral relationship will continue to grow in the future.

それでは皆さん御健闘をお祈りします。ありがとうございました。