

Speech of Ambassador ARAI Yusuke

at the Emperor's Birthday Reception

on February 20th, 2025

Good evening,

First and foremost, please allow me to express my deep sorrow over the return of the bodies of four hostages. On behalf of the Japanese Government, I extend our condolences to the families who have lost their loved ones. May they find their final rest among the family and friends after 503 days.

It is my strong hope that the safe return of the rest of all hostages will take place without any further delay and that those fled from both the northern and southern regions of Israel can promptly return to their homes in peace and security.

Despite today's tragic event, I believe that today will be an important occasion for all those who are here to witness our solidarity and commitment for stronger ties between Japan and Israel in this difficult time.

This year, I hope that regional stability will be achieved, including the situation in Gaza. I am eager to see Israel solidifying even more robust relationship with neighboring countries, as well as moving further to forge deeper relations with the Indo-Pacific. The peace and stability of the Middle East, along with Israel's stronger connections to the Indo-Pacific, are in Japan's interest. To achieve this, I am committed to working closely with my friends in Israel.

Israel's strength and potential that I have outlined so far have been recognized by many, including those in Japan. For example, Japanese businesses have been holding a high level of interest in Israel's cutting-edge technologies, including AI, fintech, and healthcare. As Japanese Ambassador, I will continue making my effort to strengthen the ties

between the two countries including in these areas. In this regard, the Government of Japan eased the travel advisory level for Israel at the end of last year. This brought about a gradual return of Japanese companies that had evacuated following 10.7. We are working to accelerate this positive development.

Ladies and gentlemen, during my eight-month in Israel, I have had many opportunities to experience local cuisine, wines, and cultural offerings. I have consistently appreciated the diversity, depth, and dynamism that characterize Israel's cultural landscape. What have struck me the most, however, were strong sense of ties and bonds among the Israeli people, which I believe are the keys to national resilience.

I am also delighted by the strong sense of affinity and interest that the people of Israel have for Japan. Last month, the Japanese Film Festival in Israel was a great success, with tickets for many films completely sold out. I was particularly impressed to see a full audience in a hall that seats over 400 people.

Such interest is also reflected in the increasing number of Israelis visiting Japan, which has been setting new records, reaching around 60,000 last year.

My mission is to enhance the connection between Japan and Israel across various sectors. Such collaboration will undoubtedly benefit both nations. Furthermore, I aim to facilitate Israel's integration into the Indo-Pacific region. I look forward to working with all of you to achieve these objectives.

Today, on the occasion of the 65th Emperor's birthday, we have prepared Japanese food, sake, and wine for you. I hope everyone here will be able to experience a small trip to Japan.

Thank you very much.