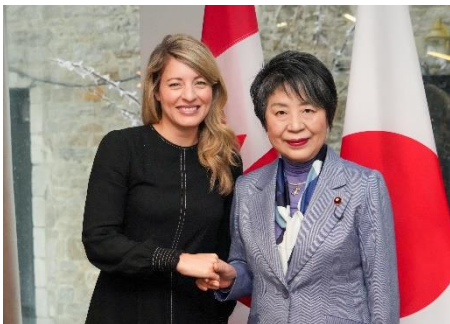


Best wishes to all for the new year.

First and foremost, I would like to express my condolences in regards to the victims of the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake as well as my deepest sympathy to those who were affected by this disaster. We have also received words of sympathy from different representatives of the provinces in our jurisdiction.

I must also mention that Mr. Claude Gagné, important contributor to Japan-Canada relations, has passed away last December. He was for many years, from the establishment of the Japanese Pavilion at the Montreal Botanical Garden in 1989 to 2015, president of the Foundation of the Japanese Garden and Pavilion of Montreal. He also served as president of the Chadō Urasenke Tankōkai Montreal Association. The Consulate General of Japan in Montreal reiterates here its sincerest condolences.

The beginning of 2024 was also marked by an event of particular importance for the advancement of the Japan-Canada relations: Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoko Kamikawa's visit to Montreal. It is the first visit to Montreal by a Japanese Foreign Affairs minister in five years. Minister Kamikawa held a meeting with the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, and began by expressing her pleasure at visiting Canada for the first time in nine years and meeting her Canadian counterpart. She conveyed her gratitude for the words of sympathy offered by the Government of Canada in relation to the Noto Peninsula Earthquake and the Haneda Airport runway collision. Considering the mounting challenges facing the international community and the growing importance of close collaboration between Japan and Canada, and among G7 countries, both ministers concurred on further promoting Japan-Canada cooperation and G7 initiatives. In addition to exchanging views on various topics related to the current state of international affairs, they applauded the fundamental contribution of people-to-people exchange opportunities, such as the JET Programme and the Kakehashi Project, to Japan-Canada diplomatic relations and agreed to provide high-level support to the promotion of such exchanges.



Additionally, during a luncheon meeting with representatives of the local Japanese community, Minister Kamikawa expressed her respect for Japanese Canadians who, having overcome countless difficulties, are now greatly contributing to a variety of fields. She also shared her appreciation for the role of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre of Montreal in introducing and popularizing Japanese culture, promoting its understanding, and preserving the history of the Japanese Canadian community. Minister Kamikawa then conveyed her hopes of seeing relations with the Japanese Canadian community strengthened and next-generation leaders fostered through initiatives such as the Government of Japan's annual Japanese Canadian Leader Invitation Program which allows key local Japanese Canadians to visit Japan, thus building a more vibrant Japanese Canadian community.

The local Japanese community representatives spoke of their activities within the community and conveyed their passion for working as a bridge between Canada and Japan to further enhance friendly relations between

the two countries. Minister Kamikawa and the participants exchanged views in a relaxed atmosphere. A lively discussion on ways to maximize the use of the cultural centre and information technologies to enable Japanese newly arrived in Canada to better connect with the local Japanese Canadian community was also held.

Afterwards, Minister Kamikawa visited the Montreal Hoshuko School, an institution offering children with a Japanese parent complementary elementary and secondary school level education in Japanese. She also observed classes such as a Grade 8 Japanese calligraphy lesson and exchanged views with school representatives on Japanese language and culture education at the Hoshuko School.



On a more personal note, as a diplomat, when I take up office in a new country, I strive to understand the local culture. To that end, I read its Constitution and high school history textbooks, and I watch representative films. Cinematographic works hold special appeal in that it is, through their viewing, easy to absorb information and, thanks to even trivial dialogues and gestures, become acquainted with the locals' habits and way of thinking. In relation to Canada, I have watched the works listed below. Many of you may already know the fourth, but it is a documentary depicting Japanese Canadian history powerfully through videos, photos, as well as an interview with Hatsumi, an 80-year-old grandmother who has lived through the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. By watching the other films, I was able to learn much about the daily life and habits of local populations across Canada and the social climate of a specific period. Therefore, if you have any film recommendations, please do share them with me!

- *Mon oncle Antoine* (Dir. Claude Jutra, 1971)
- *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Dir. Zacharias Kunuk, 2002)
- *Les Ordres* (Dir. Michel Brault, 1974)
- *Hatsumi* (Dir. Chris Hope, 2012)