

15. REPORT ON JAPAN/SOUTH KOREA VISIT

Submitted by Councillor Alister James	
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I report on the visit last August to our sister city Kurashiki, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, our sister city Song-pa (South Korea) and Tokyo. This was the first and overdue visit to Japan and Korea by the Mayor and Mayoress who were well received in each of our sister cities and in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki and were supported by myself, Sue James, Barbara August and Bryn Somerville (media liaison). It was very valuable to have the officer support with Barbara's impeccable arrangements and planning, Bryn's experience of having lived and worked in Japan and assistance with the logistical exercise of getting around Japan. I believe that it is essential on such official visits for the Mayor to be assisted by staff and although not essential, I suggest there is added value in an elected member also supporting the Mayor.

If we are to maintain formal sister city relationships then they should be visited at least once in each term of office, by the Mayor and that the Mayor, as I say, should be supported by others, in particular the Mayoress and appropriate officers. I also believe that visits to Japan and South Korea should have a focus on trade as well as the goodwill/cultural aspect of our sister city links. There are tremendous trading opportunities in Seoul, where Songpa is in reality a sub city, and which need to be developed. Such potential is limited in Kurashiki but where valuable educational, cultural and goodwill links are well developed. There may be additional value in forming a friendship link with a major Japanese city or sub city of Tokyo which has the potential to develop strong trading links.

While in Tokyo, we became aware of the commercial value of Auckland's sister city relationship with the major Japanese city of Fukuoka and additionally its friendship link based on trade with Shinagawa-Ku in Tokyo. Mayor John Banks had visited last year and was returning again last month. I believe that this is an issue that should be discussed with the Canterbury Development Corporation, Canterbury Manufacturers' Association and the Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce.

Our group arrived in Osaka on 2 August en route to Kurashiki and throughout our journey in Japan we were impressed with the Japanese rail system which was reliable, clean and comfortable. The state of public toilets both in Japan and in Korea was also impressive being readily available, with a high standard of cleanliness, lack of vandalism and with modern public toilets being of a standard not yet seen in New Zealand.

The Kurashiki City Council officials were generous in their hospitality. We enjoyed some sightseeing including the historical Bikan area, Nozaki House, the famous Ohara Museum of Art, with its major works of European art (including Monet, El Greco and Rodin) and the Kurashiki City Art Gallery which has impressive works by Japanese artists. I feel that exchanges of art between our respective city art galleries should be encouraged at mayoral level. The formal functions included the official welcome, a tree planting ceremony and a visit to a sculpture 'pillars of wisdom' by Christchurch sculptor Douglas Neil, who won the 6th Kurashiki street sculpture award. The Mayor of Kurashiki hosted both a 30th ceremony luncheon and a banquet. The banquet was also attended by a representative from the New Zealand Embassy, Tokyo, Paula Wilson. Our Mayor was also awarded Honorary Citizenship. We attended a practice session of the Kurashiki City Youth Orchestra which had recently been to Christchurch and had performed at the Aurora Centre. Our last day, apart from a send-off from the Mayor and Mayoress Nakada and other city officials, featured a tour of Tivoli Park, an entertainment theme park with Danish style buildings and shops with Danish goods set in botanic gardens.

The Kurashiki City Council's civic offices was an impressive purpose-built building set within landscaped gardens and a model for what should be achieved in Christchurch.

Our next stop was in Hiroshima and our two night, three day visit was full of activities. First up we met with members of the Japan Consumers' Co-Operative Union, including the President, Shugo Ogura who had travelled from Tokyo to attend the memorial ceremony. This is a substantial co-operative of retail stores throughout Japan and there may be value in following up this connection which has export potential. Our Mayor discussed, both with Mr Ogura and later with the Mayor of Hiroshima, the importance of the Mayors for Peace movement also focusing on trading relationships. We attended the Hiroshima Memorial Service, toured the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the Peace Memorial Park, the Cenotaph and the Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the atomic bomb victims. We had meetings with the chairperson and other members of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation and met with the Mayor of Hiroshima, Dr Tadatoshi Akiba. The visit of representatives from Christchurch was appreciated and there were useful discussions on peace initiatives and the Mayors for Peace movement. A memorandum of peace and friendship between Christchurch and Hiroshima was signed. Mayor Akiba is a very impressive advocate for peace and an able leader who, I believe, should be encouraged by our Council to visit Christchurch. He was complimentary about the position adopted by New Zealand and of our peace movement.

Hiroshima was an attractive and prosperous city which had good landscaping and public art features. Its Motoyasu River was a city focal point much like our Avon River and a lantern festival and summertimes-type music performances were being held on the riverbanks during our stay.

Both in Hiroshima and in Nagasaki, we were joined by Dr Kate Dewes who attended the ceremonies in both cities and participated in the conference in Hiroshima against atomic and hydrogen bombs. Kate is internationally recognised for her work with the peace movement and I do not feel that her achievements (and those of Harold Evans) are as recognised in her home city of Christchurch and in New Zealand as they are in Japan and elsewhere. Christchurch is acknowledged as the first city in the world to declare itself as nuclear free (although the Port of Kobe was ahead of Christchurch in this regard but, not officially, its city). The Mayor was also pleased to announce that our city had in May 2002 become New Zealand's first peace city. This was well received.

The United Nations study on disarmament recommendation 10 encourages municipal leaders working with citizens groups "to establish peace cities as part of the UNESCO cities for peace network, through for example, the creation of peace museums, peace parks, websites, production of booklets on peace and peacemakers".

In Nagasaki, the Mayor spoke at a session of the conference referred to above and this assisted in promoting our city and outlining our own efforts in the peace movement. We met with Mayor Itoh and with Masatoshi Tsunenari, an atomic bomb survivor; both had been to Christchurch last year. We visited the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum and the separate National Peace Memorial Hall for the atomic bomb victims with its impressive and modern water feature. We were taken to see the original camphor tree which survived the atomic bomb and from which tree we had received seedlings.

Nagasaki had a different character to Hiroshima. There was less evidence of prosperity and Nagasaki had retained much of its heritage. It had been the gateway for the west into Japan and we were able to visit the Glover Gardens with its national important cultural asset status and its English-style heritage houses.

Travelling at the beginning of August to Japan was important in terms of the significance of being present for the memorial services. I believe our participation was valued. Both ceremonies were attended by foreign and local dignitaries, including the Japanese Prime Minister. They were very moving and formal and in Nagasaki our Mayor and the Mayor of Hanover, Germany together laid a floral tribute on behalf of the Mayors for Peace. The announcement of their tribute was broadcast to both those present and televised throughout Japan. The Mayor and Mayoress were accorded the privilege of being seated in the VIP area with the Prime Minister of Japan and other dignitaries. New Zealand was not otherwise represented.

The downside of travelling at this time of the year, was that it was mid summer and extremely hot, particularly wearing our dark suits at each of the ceremonies during what appeared at times to be 40 degree heat.

In both Hiroshima and in Nagasaki, we received excellent support and assistance from city officials.

After three nights and days in Nagasaki we travelled back to Hiroshima, changed trains and took the long journey to the airport for the flight to Seoul, Korea, where we spent another three nights. The staff of the Songpa City Council as in Kurashiki were exemplary in their support and transport arrangements. Formally, we were received by Mayor Yoo Taek Lee and other officials, enjoyed a tour of the city with city staff and the Deputy Mayor and a banquet on our last night. Mayor Lee was keen to develop the sharing of information on a wide range of issues such as waste management, as well as encouraging more students from Songpa to study in Christchurch. Our Mayor encouraged Mayor Lee to become involved in the Mayors for Peace movement.

Songpa is a modern city within Seoul and where the Olympic games in Seoul were held. Many of the city facilities were constructed for those games.

An experience which I valued, was the opportunity to visit the demilitarised zone on the border between South and North Korea. This was a never to be forgotten experience. A frustrating experience was the appalling traffic congestion in Seoul and the length of time taken to get between appointments. We were also privileged to visit the New Zealand soldiers from Burnham stationed in Seoul under US command but part of the UN international contingent. We were impressed with these young men, several of them being Christchurch boys, but little is known of this important contribution. New Zealand is held in high regard in South Korea with our support in the Korean War and since. We met with a prominent member of the national assembly, Jin Park, who had travelled throughout New Zealand as a scholar and guest of Prime Minister Helen Clark and who explored with us, the possibility of another sister city relationship with Seoul. We did not encourage such a relationship given the existing relationship with Songpa Gu.

We were very impressed with the support shown to us by the New Zealand Ambassador, David Taylor. He accompanied us on many of our engagements and regarded our sister city relationship as very important. With his wife, Ambassador Taylor hosted a dinner for us with Korean guests who were involved in trading with New Zealand. This was an important event for us and we appreciated the opportunity to 'do business'.

An indication of our busy schedule is that because we had insufficient time to return to our hotel to shower and change after visiting the demilitarised zone and our army battalion in Seoul, we stopped off at a luxury hotel en route to the Ambassador's home, freshened up and changed into our evening wear within the public toilets.

The function hosted by Ambassador Taylor was very valuable. We were able to discuss issues with the guests and gain a good understanding of the potential for developing trade with South Korea. I am keen to discuss various opportunities with the new Consul for South Korea in Christchurch, Doug Marsh. We were very impressed with the Tourism New Zealand representative in Korea, Sonia Hong, but not impressed with her pathetic budget. There is huge potential to attract more tourists from South Korea.

We then travelled to Tokyo for two nights and little more than a day and a half. The half day was spent exploring one or two department stores and was really our first and only free time apart from some free evenings during the tour (eat and sleep). The Mayor and I with Bryn Somerville met with the Tokyo staff of Tourism New Zealand, including Regional Manager Tenshin Kobayashi, Air New Zealand's Eastern Region Vice-President Peter Elmsly and the Marketing Manager for Japan/Korea, Michio Fujita. The Mayor and I also met with Andrew White, our Trade Commissioner in Japan. These meetings were useful. Promoting our tourist product in Japan was better resourced but we can do more to promote Christchurch and Canterbury. We gained a clearer understanding of the trade and tourism opportunities in Japan, also discussed the frequency of Air New Zealand services to and from Christchurch and impressed upon the Air New Zealand officials the importance of maintaining and enhancing these links. NZ Tourism Board staff spoke well of their relationship with staff of Christchurch and Canterbury Marketing. We also checked out their range of pamphlets of local activities and they were interested in receiving further information on our planned Garden Festival which they had heard about and believed would be of interest to visitors from Japan.

This was not a holiday. We came back exhausted and needing a holiday break in which to recharge our batteries. I would encourage the Council to consider future opportunities for elected members and the Mayor to visit South Korea and Japan but possibly involving local businesses in pursuing the trading and tourism opportunities as well as sister city relationships.

Chair's

Recommendation: That the information be received.