

As delivered

**Remarks at a Reception on the Occasion of
the Bestowal of the Foreign Minister's Commendation upon Mr Reg Clark
at the Embassy of Japan
by Ambassador Koji Tsuruoka
on Tuesday 29 November 2016**

Thank you all for coming to the Japanese Embassy this evening. I think we are all delighted to be present for this happy and important ceremony. Of course, you are all so personally close to Reg Clark that I really don't need to introduce him. But although I may be at a loss as to what to say, I do have to say a few things because it is our Foreign Minister that is acknowledging his huge contribution to our excellent relationship over the more than thirty years since the time he first went to Japan at the age of 18 as a member of the Oxford Rugby Team.

This all started with rugby. I am wearing a tie of the Japanese Rugby Union. Moreover, it seems that many of you have chosen a special tie for this reception. I did not know there was a club called Vincent's but I could not help noticing that some people were wearing the same tie. So I asked, and then of course I was told that the first ever Japanese to join Vincent's was Ambassador [Katsuhiko] Oku, a very dear friend of mine with whom I worked during my years in Tokyo as a foreign service officer but, as you may know, tragically could not come back from Iraq, where he was on a mission. He had been sent there from London after being assigned to the Embassy here to be in charge of cultural exchange between Japan and the UK. We needed an energetic person with a strong will that could survive any environment, and he was chosen to be sent to Iraq to work on reconstruction there. Of course, not everything goes as planned and we have tragedies, and I was partly responsible because I was in Tokyo overseeing the activities of the Japanese Government in Iraq.

Today is his memorial day. It just happens to be so; we didn't plan it this way. We can't plan everything to perfection, but sometimes things just happen a certain way. Maybe it is a coincidence, but I think it is very, very timely that we

are recognising Reg Clark, who was a dear friend of my dear friend Oku. The two of them enjoyed a very strong working relationship that contributed greatly to today's excellent bilateral ties between the UK and Japan.

And of course sport, most of all rugby, was the basis of their friendship. I immediately recognised who the long-time friends of Reg are as I was welcoming you through the door because you are differently built! Of course, this is something we can celebrate, as rugby is a great sport. And you may very well know that Reg worked for Kobe Steel. Of course, most of you do not know that Kobe Steel is the company for which Prime Minister Shinzo Abe worked when he was young. So he comes from the same field! One became a prime minister and now we have Reg Clark receiving a Foreign Minister's Commendation. But I think that he has got an even brighter future because Mr Abe is serving as Prime Minister and he will be able to do so for some years to come, and it all started at Kobe Steel. So we have to remember that.

On top of that, Reg was known for being in the rugby team at Kobe Steel and this was one of the very first seeds he planted for Japanese rugby to become – if I'm not being too presumptuous – world-class! So we are counting on Reg and others who are here in this room to perhaps strengthen the Japanese national team still further, because in 2019 we will be hosting the Rugby World Cup in Japan, which is what I am representing here. That was also made possible thanks to Reg's very hard work, because – again, as some of you may know – we may not have been so successful if we had tried just by ourselves.

As another good friend of mine, Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Health, told me, "In the UK we say, try, try, and try again" – three times. He also referred to the Japanese saying 七転び八起き (*nanakorobi yaoki*), which means you may fall down seven times but you still get up an eighth time. So we were prepared to make the effort seven times, and perhaps that is something which resonates with the spirit of rugby. But as for the Rugby World Cup, we are all happy and lucky to have succeeded in bringing it to Japan in 2019. We are all waiting for you to come to support the many teams that your country will be sending. I'm always a bit puzzled when I hear about the World Cup, assuming that it is one-country one-team, but perhaps because rugby originated in the UK you have

additional slots! But all these teams are so strong, they are among the best five or so, which means that having just one team would be so unfair because you would never be beaten! So perhaps that's another case of how things evolve, not always in accordance with a perfect plan. Anyway, in 2019 rugby is going to be once again a major event that is going to unite and bind our two peoples together.

So, I have to mention just a few of Reg's contributions of which you are already well aware because it is my duty to officially represent my Minister in awarding Reg his Commendation. One thing, of course, is rugby, on which he spends so much time. But he is also a businessman, an entrepreneur, a historian, and – the next is very important! – a high-flying member of Vincent's. I don't think that I need to explain to you what that is. And, of course, a very close friend of the late Ambassador Oku. Inspired by his friendship with Oku, Reg has flourished in many ways, constantly deploying the talent, courage and energy to promote amicable ties between Japan and the UK. Oku was not Reg's only partner in all these endeavours, but was a very important figure when he was here in London and even at the time he was at Oxford University in 1982, where the two met for the first time. And – just another of his achievements – Oku was the first Japanese to be admitted as an Oxford Blue and, of course, the first to be a member of a certain club for sporting high-flyers. I am looking forward to visiting Vincent's myself if they will kindly let me in!

So I would like now to award Mr Reg Clark the Foreign Minister's Commendation, and I think you will all agree that he truly deserves this recognition. I also have to say that this is not the end; it's only the beginning. When you have the Foreign Minister's Commendation awarded to you, and there is another friend in the same room that has also received it, the Foreign Minister's expectation is that you will redouble your efforts! That's how the award business works! Thank you very much, Reg. Many congratulations!