

Rabbi Levi Wolff,

Mr. Keisuke Sugihara,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some Boys and Girls,

Good morning.

Thank you for inviting me to The Central Synagogue. This is my first visit to a synagogue.

I feel most privileged to be here today at this special service honouring Chiune Sugihara.

Considering this speech, it seemed to me that there was little I could say, because the actions of Chiune Sugihara speak more eloquently than any words of mine. Hearing personal stories directly from descendants about the lives of their families saved by Mr. Sugihara's actions makes me shiver.

Mr Sugihara is remembered in Japan and around the world for his strong sense of humanity which compelled him under most challenging circumstances to issue transit visas to Jewish refugees who were fleeing the Nazis in Lithuania. These transit visas came to be known as Visas of Life, and by issuing these visas, Mr Sugihara saved thousands of lives. When one considers the descendants of those survivors, tens of thousands of lives are owed to his actions.

Today Mr Sugihara is known as a “courageous diplomat of humanity” in Japan. On the 100th anniversary of his birth, in the year 2000, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs honoured Chiune Sugihara and unveiled a plaque at its Diplomatic Archives so that his legacy, a legacy of Japan’s diplomacy, would never be forgotten by future generations.

At the time of the unveiling of the plaque commemorating Mr. Sugihara, then Foreign Minister Yohei Kono said he was proud that we had such a wonderful diplomat as our predecessor. Chiune Sugihara’s courageous humanity is of course an inspiring example for diplomats like me, but a model for all of us to learn.

In Japan, the 100th anniversary of his birth in the year 2000 was a time to reflect on Mr Sugihara's actions and understand his legacy.

Apart from the official recognition I just mentioned, awareness in Japan was heightened in various ways. A postal stamp of Mr Sugihara was released, and a museum was opened in the town where he was born, Yaotsu in Gifu Prefecture.

In the following years, his story continues to be told: there have been a TV drama series and a musical called "*Sempo: the Story of Chiune Sugihara, Japan's Schindler*".

According to a survey conducted by a well-known Japanese polling company a few years ago, Mr. Chiune Sugihara was ranked among the top 10 Japanese people the world can be proud of.

There is going to be a new Japanese film about his life, which has just finished shooting in Poland. The film stars the famous Japanese actress Koyuki as Chiune Sugihara's wife – Koyuki, a beautiful and

my favourite, starred in the *Last Samurai* with Tom Cruise. The film is due to be released in Japan in autumn next year. This will further spread and renew the appreciation of Mr Sugihara's actions.

Admiration for Mr Sugihara's courageous, humanitarian action transcends borders and ethnicity. And what he did continues to foster friendship between Japan and Jewish communities around the world.

In Kaunas, Lithuania, the house where Mr. Sugihara performed his duties, is now converted to his memorial museum. There is a monument erected in his honour in the capital city of Vilnius. In 2007, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan visited the place to pay their respects.

In Israel, the Government of Israel honoured Mr Sugihara with the prize for being 'Righteous Among the Nations', the Yad Vashem Prize, a prize bestowed on foreigners who have saved the lives of Jews. There is a tree in his memory at the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. We make it a point of visiting the site to pay homage when ministers or senior dignitaries visit Israel from Japan.

And of course here we are today in Sydney, honouring Chiune Sugihara in the presence of descendants of Visa-of-Life survivors, and in doing so we again appreciate the impact of his courage to care.

Thank you once again for inviting me to this auspicious ceremony, and reminding us of the great Japanese diplomat bridging Japan and the Jewish communities.