



Foreign Chambers Urge Prime Minister Suga to Engage with Foreign National Residents of Japan

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Japan, European Business Council and the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan, congratulate Prime Minister Suga on celebrating three months in office.

With full appreciation of the challenges facing the Prime Minister as he works to control the spread of the novel coronavirus, revitalize the economy, build relationships with global leaders, and establish a policy direction, we jointly urge him to reflect the needs of the foreign national residents of Japan in his policy agenda.

As has been widely reported in global media, when Japan established strict restrictions on international entry and re-entry to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus it was alone among G7 countries in its failure to distinguish between short-term foreign visitors and residents of Japan with foreign passports seeking to re-enter the country. This decision made Japan the only G7 country that refused to allow its residents with foreign passports to return home from overseas; a situation that continued from April 2020 until restrictions were relaxed in September 2020. Even now, non-Japanese residents of Japan are still subject to testing requirements for re-entry that are not applied to Japanese citizens, which can be difficult to meet in some areas of eligible countries.

We trust that this decision was made in the interest of controlling the pandemic and without the intent to discriminate against foreign national residents of Japan. However, the unfortunate result was serious damage to Japan's reputation as a country open to global business, diminished interest in pursuing a future career in Japan among foreign students and young professionals, and a deep loss of trust in the government of Japan by multinational firms and foreign national residents.

We believe that Prime Minister Suga can and will rebuild that trust. As the Prime Minister is well aware, Japan needs to engage with the world and the world needs Japan. Demographic trends in Japan mean growth opportunities for those Japanese firms who learn to compete in global markets with global talent, but challenging times for those who do not. The world's quickly-changing geopolitical landscape needs Japan's strong leadership in efforts to build a sustainable global society. Among the changes required will be the acceptance of digital forms of documents for visa applications and similar procedures affecting foreign residents.

Therefore, as a first step to rebuilding trust, we respectfully ask the Government of Japan to treat foreign residents of Japan in the same manner as Japanese residents when it comes to novel coronavirus testing requirements, conditions for re-entry to Japan and vaccinations. To maximize the effect of this change in assuring potential future residents that it is worth the time to invest in learning about Japan, we would suggest it be enshrined in law, but the immediate first step can be accomplished by the Prime Minister's direction to relevant Ministries.

There are approximately 2.93 million residents of Japan who hold passports from other countries, and this number will only increase. The talents and perspectives of foreign national residents of Japan are drivers of economic growth and social vitality. Any policy agenda that fails to incorporate the needs of all of Japan's residents, regardless of nationality, will struggle to enrich Japanese society and further damage Japan's global reputation.

As foreign chambers of commerce, we stand eager to engage with Prime Minister Suga and his cabinet, and will continue to work with Japanese policymakers and industry partners to make our shared home, Japan, the inclusive, innovative, and strong global leader we know it can be.