

Welcome remarks at DWN reception at Pilke Rovaniemi on Feb. 22, 2017

Distinguished Guests,

My name is Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan, who came to Finland 10 months ago. This is my first trip to Lapland, arriving in Rovaniemi two hours ago.

For the past two hours, I have been chilled with a chilly temperature in Lapland, and at the same time, I have been much warmed with a heartwarming temperature of the people of Lapland.

Now I know very much City Mayor Mr. Esko Lotvonen, as I had the honor to meet him some tens of minutes ago. He is a fascinating navigator, and has let me know how fascinating Lapland is. I would like to thank him for joining us. This is a great honor.

I know Ms. Liisa Ansala very much too. As everybody knows, she chairs the Rovaniemi City Board. And did you know that she chairs the Lapland-Japan Association as well? I am very happy to see this precious friend-of-Japan association at her good hand.

I am looking forward to exchanging Hauska tavata with many more people in Rovaniemi today and tomorrow, and I am looking forward to exchanging Pitkästä aikaa with the same people next time and on many occasions to come.

We are now witnessing a series of years to celebrate. Among others, this year marks Suomi 100, and only two years later, 2019 will be Japani Suomi 100, 100 years anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Finland.

For the past 98 years, Japan and Finland have consolidated the mutual respect, mutual confidence, and unwavering friendship. Human contact is the constant engine to make it possible, and human network between the two countries is still expanding and further strengthened.

Visitors from Japan to Lapland are increasing steadily. In 2016 last year, the number was 21,888 as increased by 10% from the previous year. Many Japanese people are coming to Lapland to appreciate the beauty of its landscape and culture.

But after all, they come to enjoy conversations with the people of Lapland as surrounded by peace, tranquility and safety. We cherish the value of human-to-human contact.

Perhaps there may be a lot of synergies between us. Respect for nature is one example, and ability to communicate with nature is another example. Dialogue with Nature is a nice phrase, well describing a basic common approach of Japanese and Lappi & Finnish people.

I would like to thank Erkki Kautto-san, Kai Sayoko-san, Ulla Pirkola-san & other members of the Exhibition Committee, Takebe Tokuma-san & many Yamaguchilainen, Kirsi-Marja Korhonen-san, ADW staff & many Rovaniemalainen, and all the people who made this exhibition possible, who made this reception possible.

The partnership agreement between the two cities was signed last November, and only within 3 months, you have done it. This exhibition speaks volumes of the "Dialogue with Nature", and speaks so eloquently of the dialogue between the peoples working together yhdessä.

I have some information for you. According to the Ministry of Education & Culture of Finland, the opportunity to study the Japanese language has been expanding. More universities & polytechnics are now providing courses for the basic Japanese. Since last year, high schools have been able to introduce Japanese as an optional linguistic class.

The language is the very engine of human exchange, and human exchange is the very engine of the true friendship between nations.

To commemorate Suomi 100 by facilitating Japanese-Finnish exchange, the long awaited Japanese-Finnish dictionary will be published very soon on February 24. I believe this will help further promoting the close human contacts of Japan with Rovaniemi, Lapland and Finland. Today I am bringing flyers the publisher made for you, and your kind attention will be highly appreciated.

To conclude my short remarks for hauska tavata, I wish for your health and happiness, and I would like to pray for keeping our collaboration yhdessä to celebrate Suomi 100 in 2017, and to pre-celebrate Japani Suomi 100 of 2019.