

Remarks by HE Ambassador Jota Yamamoto of Japan

Her Excellency Madame Maria Lohela, Speaker of the Eduskunta, Honorable Members of the Parliament, and Distinguished Guests,

Thank you very much for giving me the privilege to admire this beautifully renovated house of Parliament, to celebrate Suomi 100, and to reassure you of the continued relevance of Japan to Finland.

I would like to thank Madame Speaker and the distinguished members of the Parliament for always extending the heartwarming consideration to Japan and other Asian countries.

I would also like to thank Madame Maija-Leena Paavola, Secretary-General of Parliament, and her staff who made possible this heartwarming arrangement today.

Japan is one of the oldest countries of the world. Nobody knows how old Japan is, at least I do not know. But its interaction with the modern international community has a relatively short history.

When Tuomiokirkko was built in Helsinki in 1852, Japan was still sleeping and closed its doors to external relations. Only in its next year 1853, America knocked this closed door to awaken Japan, and with the treaty of amity of 1854, Japan eventually acquired its identified “position amongst the people of the civilized world”. The national governmental regime of modern era was born in Japan in 1868, thus it is of the same age as Uspenskin Katedraali.

Finland has a long history of parliamentary bodies even before independence. In terms of democracy, my country has always followed the steps of Finland ahead of us. Though Japan inaugurated its first Parliamentary session in 1890, the first universal but only masculine suffrage was held in Japan in 1928, 21 years later than your case, and female suffrage was admitted in 1946, 39 years later than your case.

I believe that this year 2017 has given us a precious chance not only to appreciate the 100 years of your country, but also to look back to the 100 years of my country. The same will continue next year, and next next year as well. May 24, 2019 will mark Japani Suomi 100.

Madame Speaker, Honorable Members of the Parliament and Distinguished Guests,

In 1998, one gentleman from Japan started planting cherry blossom trees in Helsinki, and in 2007 he started planting cherry blossom trees in Roihuvuori Park. 10 years later, we now see in Roihuvuori as many as 150 cherry blossom trees blooming every spring, and tens of thousands of local and visiting people enjoying the annual spring festivity.

I am so much appreciative of the father of the Roihuvuori Hanami Festivity, Mr. Norio Tomida, and so is my foreign minister appreciative so much of Tomida-san, he was recently commended by the foreign minister of Japan. That commendation was apparently addressed to Tomida-san, and eventually addressed to all the local community people of Roihuvuori too. I would like to thank them for their constant kind care extended to those cherry blossom trees.

This year, my Prime Minister came to Finland in July to congratulate for Suomi 100, and with the good office of Tomida-san, some saplings came in July to join the cherry blossom forest in Roihuvuori. It was the donation of the Japan Sakura Foundation to the City of Helsinki. In my country, Sakura, cherry blossom tree, is the very icon to bless and celebrate the birth, reproduction, eternity and happiness of life.

Helsingin Sanomat wrote that “Japan figured that if Finnish government is lacking something, it is wood.” It is not the case as nobody can figure that anybody Finnish is lacking wood, but it may be right as cherry blossom tree is, in my country, the very icon to bless and celebrate the birth, reproduction, eternity and happiness of life in a very recycling manner. And Helsingin Sanomat was definitely correct as it said that “cherry blossom trees might bloom still in the 22nd century.”

Today I am honored to announce that cherry blossom trees be gifted from Japan to the Parliament of the Republic of Finland. It was made possible by the generous Japan Sakura Foundation again. I am allowed to convey its congratulatory message & the congratulatory gift from the Foundation’s Chair, Honorable Tadamori Oshima, Speaker of the House of Representatives as addressed to H.E. Madame Maria Lohela, Speaker of the Eduskunta.

In his message, President of the Foundation Honorable Susumu Hasumi, ex-member of the House of Representatives and former Senior Vice Minister of Land & Transport said:

“Please accept my heartfelt congratulations for the renovation of the Parliamentary house. This summer I and the members of the Foundation visited Helsinki, and planted Sakura trees to commemorate Suomi 100. The fame of Roihuvuori park with its beauty of Sakura is well known, and impressed us so much. The Foundation is dignified to present Sakura trees and celebrate the renovation of the Parliamentary house, and I believe that this may further enhance Japan-Finland friendship. I wish that these Sakura trees bloom at the Eduskunta, and add further colors to our friendship and your prosperity.”

On behalf of my country, I would herewith like to reiterate my heartfelt congratulations for Suomi 100, wishing for another 100 years of the never-changing friendship between the two countries. I believe that some of those trees may survive and bloom even up to Suomi 200 and Japanese Suomi 200 in the next century. Wishing for such landscape for our future generations, I would like to conclude my remarks.