

Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Jota Yamamoto of Japan on the reception to bid farewell to Col. Fujita, and to welcome new Defence Attaché LtC Matoba.

8 March 2018

Honorable Defence Minister Dr. Niinistö, Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

Thank you for your kind attendance today. For the past two weeks, I was in Helsinki only for four days, as I was otherwise in Tokyo to receive Honorable Foreign Minister Mr. Soini visiting my country, and to attend the annual meeting of ambassadors to Europe. A coherent agenda was how to identify challenges in Europe, and how Japan can contribute to overcoming increasing difficulties.

A conclusion of discussion was simple and clear. While cooperating as a responsible partner to further strengthen the EU, Japan will at the same time further strengthen bilateral relations with the respective countries in Europe. Now we see the rapidly diversified, multi-facet Europe.

The same applies to security context and defence exchange. While cooperating as a responsible partner with the EU, Japan shall at the same time further strengthen bilateral defence exchange with the respective countries in Europe.

My Foreign Minister Mr. Kono attended the recent Munich Security Conference, and its implication was obvious. And this is the very reason for my State Minister of Defense Mr. Yamamoto to meet with Defence Minister Dr. Niinistö at Munich and to exchange views on how to see the circumstances.

Against such background, and after 4 years' absence, the post of resident defense attaché has now been restored, and I am able to welcome today LtCol Matoba to Helsinki. He is also in charge of Estonia, which speaks volumes to what we think. It is most certain that LtCol will undertake his mission with his talented capability and heartwarming smiles.

For the past years, however, even without resident defense attaché, we could still maintain necessary contacts with each other. It was only made possible by leaving defense attaché Col Fujita, who has taken care of us from Stockholm. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Col Fujita for his talented and heartwarming dedication for Helsinki.

Honorable Defence Minister and Distinguished Guests,

Thank you very much to come to join us to bid farewell to leaving Col Fujita and to welcome LtCol Matoba. I would like to ask for your continued blessing to them, and your continued blessing to defense exchange between Japan and Finland, between Japan and Europe.[end]

Remarks by Colonel Hiroyuki Fujita

Minister, Excellences, Sirs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I'd like to express my deep appreciation to all of you who have gathered here today. And I appreciate Ambassador YAMAMOTO to give me this chance of speaking a few words. Also, it's a great honor for me to be a part of this historical event.

As you know, I'm non-resident Defense Attaché and stationed in Stockholm, but we used to have resident Defense Attachés in Helsinki until 2014.

The last one was Colonel Tsushima, maybe someone knows him.

About four years have already passed since the Defense Attaché office was closed. This period of four years is practically a short time, but it feels very long.

However, our Government finally decided to re-open the Defense Attaché Office again, and my successor Lt. Col. Matoba has arrived here.

This was a very big decision for us.

I have tried to maintain the relationship between Japan and Finland, but I believe a resident Defense Attaché will play a great role in promoting and enhancing our relationship.

I'm very glad of this. But at the same time, I'm honestly and privately sad and would want to stay longer in Helsinki, because I love Finland, but that's life.

I have been here about 2 years and 9 months. During this time, I've really enjoyed the Defense Attaché life in Helsinki.

I feel my journey is very short, but I have had very fun time thanks to all of you, especially Ministry of Defense, Defense Forces and my friends, Defense Attachés.

I am always impressed about Finnish hospitality, kind support and SAUNA.

I have many, many good memories in Finland, and one example is the 1 million millimeter biathlon which is arranged by Defense Forces.

This is biathlon competition with Finnish ski gear.

As I mentioned at the Japanese Defense Forces' Day reception last year, the Finnish Armed Forces gave me this ski gear because I have big feet and hard to find appropriate gear.

I feel this is a kind of symbol of Finnish hospitality and our relationship. And I thought I could use it again this year's competition. But I got one problem.

This event will be held in two weeks. And my successor is already here earlier than I expected. So, I don't have a chance to use it.

Personally, I want to keep it. But in this case, I have to hand it over to my successor. I believe this gear will lead him to first prize in triathlon, plus enhance the relationship for both countries.

I guess it's time to hand over not only this gear, but also the opportunity of speaking to my successor.

Last but not least, I would like to express my appreciation for your kind support and close friendship, and also express my hope for further enhanced cooperation between our countries. I wish good health and well-being for all of you present here today.

Remarks by Lieutenant Colonel Shinya Matoba

Your Excellences, Sirs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to have this opportunity of personally extending to all present a few words of greeting on my accreditation.

Let me express how deeply we are honored to have with us today so many persons related to the Finnish MoD, Defense Forces, Defense Attaches accredited to Finland, and all the other persons concerned, including His Excellency the Minister of Defense of Finland, Jussi Niinistö, and Your Excellences.

I am Lieutenant Colonel Shinya MATOBA, accredited as a resident Defense Attaché to Finland for the first time in three and a half years since August 2014.

As all of you know, at the present time, the security environment surrounding Japan has become increasingly severe, with various challenges and destabilizing factors becoming more tangible and acute. And there is a growing risk that unrest or security problems in a single country or region could immediately develop into a challenge or destabilizing factor for the entire international community.

Simultaneously, the security challenges and destabilizing factors are very complex, diverse and wide-ranging, and it is becoming ever more difficult for a single country to deal with them on its own. Under the present circumstances, it is indispensable for Japan to advance close cooperation in all possible ways in time of peace with Finland, a main strategic partner, in dealing with international challenges, including North Korea.

Geopolitically, Finland is a very important country for Japan in Europe, so now I am very delighted and honored to be here as the resident Defense Attaché in order to enhance defense cooperation of the two countries and positive exchange, and to express the view that Japan is attaching greater importance to Europe.

Before August 2014, there has been a total of ten Japanese resident Defense Attachés accredited to Finland. After that, two Defense Attaches, including Colonel FUJITA, resident in Stockholm, have continued to maintain a good relationship with Finland and all the concerned.

From now on, I am going to take over the trust and friendship Colonel FUJITA has achieved with Finland and all the concerned. And I would like to expand and deepen it as much as possible.

I am not sure of how much help I can be, but I am determined to make every effort in my work to advance defense cooperation between Japan and Finland and world peace. I am relying on you for your generous support.

Finally, let me conclude my remarks by expressing my hope for further enhanced cooperation between our two countries and for the good health and wellbeing of all you present here today.

Paljon kiitoksia tästä päivästä. Thank you very much.