

**Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Takashi Murata
at the Ramstedt Party
at the National Museum of Finland, 17 May 2019**

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Takashi Murata. I came to Finland to assume my duty as Ambassador of Japan on 16th of last month. And today, I wish to sincerely congratulate on the opening of this party celebrating the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Finland. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Finnish-Japanese Society chaired by Ms. Marketta Forsell for organizing this event as well as Ms. Elina Anttila, the Director General of the National Museum of Finland and her staff for supporting this event.

This evening, Ms. Haruko Hayakawa, Chairperson of the Japan Finland Society, who has come from Japan for the award ceremony of the Chujo Watanabe scholarship, and a delegation of the Hamamatsu Finland Society to “Omikoshi (Portable Shrine)” parade tomorrow headed by its Chairman Mr. Hiroaki Hodai join us all the way from Japan. Furthermore, Ms. Venla Ailasmäki, the Finland’s first Sakura Queen is present with us. She visited Japan together with members of the Roihuvuori Society last month.

Everybody gathered here today is people who have widely expanded and strongly strengthened the circles of human connections that our predecessors from the both countries created as a foundation of the friendship between Japanese and Finnish peoples. It is a great honour for me to get together with you all to celebrate this significant 100th anniversary.

It can be said that firstly Dr. Gustaf John Ramstedt, who was a professor at the University of Helsinki and appointed as Finland's first envoy to Japan in 1919 and secondly the Watanabe family pioneered these relationships between our countries.

Alongside his diplomatic duties, Dr. Ramstedt is known as having interacted with Japanese scholars as a linguist, and as having influenced such Japanese folklorists and authors as Kunio Yanagida and Kenji Miyazawa. Upon his return to Finland, he established the first course in Japanese at the University of Helsinki in 1938. He also founded and served as the first Chairperson of the Finnish Japanese Society in 1935. He thus laid the foundations for the exchange and friendships between the two countries that continue today.

Baptized in Nagano Prefecture in 1905, Tadao Watanabe travelled to Finland in 1907 to study, and remained here doing missionary work until 1911. At that time there were no formal diplomatic relations between Japan and Finland. Tadao Watanabe is said to be the first Japanese person to reside here in Finland for a long period. While in Finland he met his wife Siiri

Pitkänen, who gave birth to their sons Chujo and Akeo. The older son Chujo became a journalist working internationally for Kyodo News and also served as the Chairman of the Finnish-Japanese Society. Akeo, meanwhile, became a conductor, introducing the music of Sibelius to Japan and founding the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra.

Unlike now, as there were no flights available at that time, and languages, cultures and customs are different, their lives straddling the two countries must have been full of hardships. I cannot but feel deep respect for Ramstedt and the Watanabe family for playing such active and important roles as bridges between the two countries, despite such difficulties.

The Finnish Japanese Society and the Japan Finland Society created scholarships in honor of Ramstedt and Chujo Watanabe, respectively. I believe that later tonight we will also have the award ceremonies for the two scholarships. These scholarships are wonderful initiatives for promoting cultural and scientific cooperation, as well as mutual understanding between the citizens of both countries. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to both societies for their initiatives.

Embassy of Japan hopes to do our part in deepening the solid relationship of trust which has been built between the two countries over the last 100 years. At the same time, as the relationship has expanded beyond the frame of bilateral relations to become a strategic partnership between Europe and Asia, we

also hope to develop it further to bring mutual benefits in many fields of endeavor.

I hope that we can take tonight's party as an opportunity to reflect upon the efforts and hardships of our predecessors during the past 100 years, and to look ahead to imagine how the next 100 years might look like for Finland and Japan.

Thank you.

(End)