

**Remarks by H.E. Takashi Murata,
Ambassador of Japan to Finland,
at Sakura Saplings Donation Ceremony,
Lahti Poetry Marathon 2019 on 15 June**

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Takashi Murata. I came to Finland to assume my duty as Ambassador of Japan on 16th April. I wish to sincerely congratulate on successfully holding the Lahti Poetry Marathon 2019. I learn that as this year marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Finland, a month-long “Japan Week” was especially organized, which hosts various cultural exchange programs besides Poetry Marathon. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Rauno Kurki, Chairman of Lahti Runomaraton, and all of those concerned for their endeavors to host this wonderful event.

Lahti Poetry Marathon was organized by the late Mr. Jouko Skinnari, the former Chairman of the Parliamentary Finnish-Japanese Friendship Group in 1982. In 2017, requested from Mr. Ville Skinnari, a son of the late Mr. Jouko Skinnari,

Poetry Marathon was developed to include various cultural exchange programs between Japan and Finland. Mr. Ville Skinnari was appointed as Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade under the new government recently formed and continues to assume Chairman of the Parliamentary Finnish-Japanese Friendship Group. Taking this occasion, I wish to express my sincere respect to both the late Mr. Jouko and Mr. Ville Skinnari for their long years of dedication.

Now, we are going to see an event where saplings of Japanese cherry blossoms will be donated. Thanks to a great support from Mr. Iguchi, the former Chairman of the Hokkaido Finland Association, the saplings of Ezoyamazakura, beautiful cherry blossoms in Hokkaido, will be donated to Lahti City. Mr. Iguchi also donated the same kind of saplings to Roihuvuori park in the past, a well-known place for its cherry blossoms festival. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Iguchi for his initiatives to greatly promote cultural exchanges between Japan and Finland through cherry blossoms.

Human connections cultivated in various fields lay the foundation of the friendship of both countries over 100 years. These connections owe much to continued interactions at the grassroots level, represented by Lahti Poetry Marathon and friendship associations in both countries.

Embassy of Japan will do our part in deepening the solid relationship of trust by developing it further to bring mutual benefits in many fields including culture and art.

I conclude my remarks by wishing for Japan Week to deepen mutual understanding and cultural exchanges between both countries as well as wishing for these saplings to grow steadily as a symbol of the friendship between Lahti City and Hokkaido.

Thank you. Kiitos paljon.