

Remarks by HE Ambassador Murata on 27 February 2020 in the reception to celebrate His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday

The Speaker of Parliament, His Excellency Mr Matti Vanhanen, Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

It is a great pleasure to celebrate with you all His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday for the first time after his enthronement. I sincerely appreciate your attendance today.

His Majesty the Emperor of Japan inherited the throne on 1st of May as the 126th Emperor, and proclaimed the enthronement on October 24th last year, where he received felicitations from no less than 200 royal families and leaders from all over the world. Finland was represented by His Excellency President Sauli Niinistö. As a Japanese, I am proud that a new era of Japan has commenced with so many witnesses in the international society.

In the ceremony, His Majesty has addressed his hope. Quote: *"our country achieves further development and contributes to the friendship and peace of the international community, the welfare and prosperity of humankind."* Unquote. That *has been* the hope of our whole nation.

Last year, we had another celebration. Japan and Finland welcomed 100 anniversary since the establishment of the diplomatic relations in 1919, just two years after the independence of Finland.

100-years is a history of interaction and friendship of the two countries. However, it's not a history of the past but the history in progress. Last summer, invited by President Niinistö, Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino visited Finland. They were warmly welcome by those who have dedicated themselves between the two countries, which is the very moment of making the history.

One of the excellent interactions must be Sakura relation. Idea presented by a Japanese and effort of many Finnish people have created Hanami Festival in Roihuvuori Park, which gathers 20,000 visitors – what a successful place to unite people! You are most welcome on May 9th this year. Nowadays, Eduskunta has Sakura Tree Park, which encourages parliament members of both countries to unite each other such as friendship groups. His Excellency Mr Vanhanen, I ask for your kind support for this exchange to continue.

This year the exchange of people will expand through sports – Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games for the first time in 56 years. The Games symbolize peace and friendship to unite the world. Some might say Finnish interest is on winter games, but remember Finland succeeded in Tokyo 1964 Games with three gold medals. The expectations of Tokyo 2020 are not only in

cultural exchange but also with people exchange such as the heads of nations including Finland.

Moreover, Finnish *Metsä*-Pavilion will open in the premises of Finnish Embassy in Japan on July 1st, which, I believe, gives more ideas for us to interact with each other. Today, we have an advanced exhibition by Japanese companies down stairs. Not so big as the Pavilion, but please feel a taste of Japan.

Whole Japan is ready to welcome you now that we have a direct flight between Helsinki and Hokkaido since last December, and also Haneda, nearest airport to Tokyo, is going to reach the arm to Helsinki from the end of March as well as Narita. I cordially hope that Tokyo 2020 Games make the place where new interaction and friendship are born and developed further like the Rugby World Cup last October in Japan. I would like to close my speech with the motto of Tokyo 2020. We are United by Emotion! Kiitos paljon.

END