

**Remarks by
Mr. IWAMA Ryoji,
Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Japan in Finland at
“Inauguration of Erik Laxman’s Memorial Plaque” in
Savonlinna on 26 April 2021**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to have an opportunity to participate this Inauguration of Erik Laxman’s Memorial Plaque. I really appreciate Mayor Mr. Janne Laine and City Council Member Ms. Chieko Okabe for their efforts to realize this important event finally with high precautions measures despite many obstacles due to the COVID-19. I wish to offer many congratulations.

As Mr. Junhani Heiska mentioned, Erik Laxman is a great Finnish natural scientist who was born in Savonlinna. His quest was not limited to natural science. He dreamed to visit to Japan for many years. But unfortunately he died in Siberia on his way traveling to Japan.

Next year 2022 will mark the 230th anniversary of the return home

of the Japanese shipwrecked sailor Daikokuya Kodayu. He got stuck to stay in Siberia for about 10 years after he had drifted ashore on Russia. Erik Laxman was the man who helped Kodayu to realize his long-standing desire to go home. Laxman escorted him to the court of Catherine the Great for a petition. Kodayu returned home guided by Laxman's son, Adam, in 1792.

When I learnt this story, I was amazed at emotional bonds built between Erik Laxman and Daikokuya Kodayu. That was the first friendship between the Japanese and Finnish peoples. Since then, the both peoples have individually developed emotional bonds of friendship in a vast network of connections in every walk of life. That have made up strong friendly and cooperative relations that we enjoy between Japan and Finland now.

Today, I am very proud of standing on the soil of the hometown of Erik Laxman where a seed of our friendship sprouted. I hope here that the emotionally bonded amicable relations will further develop and expand between Japanese and Finnish peoples.