

**Address by Mr. OHASHI Kenji,
Head of Cultural and Public Relations Section,
“The Story of Erik Laxman” Concert on 16 October 2021**

I would like to extend my sincere congratulations on the opening of “The Story of Erik Laxman” concert. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to those concerned from Savonlinna Senior Secondary School of Arts and Music, the National Museum of Finland Olavinlinna Castle and Eastern Savo Municipal Federation of Education Samiedu Vocational College for their efforts to make this concert possible.

While the world renowned Savonlinna Opera Festival was cancelled for 2 years in a row due to the COVID-19 situation, it is our great pleasure to see this concert take place here today.

In 2019, the musical of a Japanese folktale, “Tsuruno Ongaeshi”, “The Crane of Gratitude”, was performed by Savonlinna Senior Secondary School of Arts and Music to commemorate the centenary of the establishment of our bilateral diplomatic relation.

With regard to Erik Laxman, a seminar was held in Savonlinna in November 2019. In April this year, the Erik Laxman's memorial plaque was also inaugurated.

We really appreciate such endeavors by Savonlinna for making a great contribution to the friendship between Japan and Finland.

Over two hundred years ago, Erik Laxman, a Savonlinna naturalist, exerted himself to help Daikokuya Kodayu, a Japanese sailor who was wrecked and drifted to Russia, return to Japan. In 1792, with tremendous efforts by Erik Laxman, Daikokuya Kodayu successfully returned to Japan accompanied by Erik's son, Adam Laxman.

This is the story of a strange twist of fate between a Japanese and a Finnish over two hundred years ago. The friendship that originated from the warm act of kindness of our predecessors has been passed down steadily to the young people here and alive who will play a central role in deepening our bilateral relationship in

the next generation. This is truly reassuring for us.

Newt year, 2022, marks the 230th anniversary of the return home of Daikokuya Kodayu to Japan. Taking this opportunity, the Embassy of Japan plans to launch the “Finnish and Japanese Friendship Year 2022” and to organize various commemorative events in order for people to recollect our strong bond and warm friendship, and to further enhance our amicable bilateral relation.

I conclude my remarks by wishing that this concert would recall the great achievements which Savonlinna-born Erik Laxman made. Those include the first warm friendship between Finnish and Japanese peoples which have been cherished by our predecessors to be a solid friendly relation between Japan and Finland which we enjoy now.

(End)