

**Address by H.E. Ambassador FUJIMURA Kazuhiro
on the Occasion of Opening of Sakura Park in Lahti
on 21 May 2022**

His Excellency Ville Skinnari, Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade,

Ms. Sirkku Hilden, Chairman of the City Board, City of Lahti,

Mr. Denis Mustonen, Development Director, City of Lahti,

Mr. Isto Vanhamäki, Development Director, Lahti Region Development LADEC,

Mr. Tero Salomaa, Chair of Friends of Japanese Culture Association,

Ms. Marketta Forsell, Chair of Finnish-Japanese Society,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon. I am FUJIMURA Kazuhiro, Ambassador of Japan to Finland. I have assumed my duties as Ambassador since I arrived in Finland on 21 April.

First of all, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations on the opening of Sakura Park. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to all of those concerned for their great efforts.

I have learned that this Sakura Park has been built as a result of the highest number of public votes. It is my great pleasure to see cherry blossoms have been widely cherished here.

I have also learned that last year Hokkaido Finland Society donated 25 Ezoyamazakura saplings to this park. I would like to highly commend such a great endeavor by Hokkaido Finland Society to develop friendly relations between Japan and Finland.

Both Minister Skinnari and his father, Jouko Skinnari, served as the Chairman of the Parliamentary Finnish-Japanese Friendship Group, and dedicated themselves to creating a solid foundation for bilateral friendship between Japan and Finland for long years.

In addition, Lahti has been a host of “Japan week”. And today, this Sakura Park has the opening ceremony. There is no doubt that a keen interest

and understanding of Japanese culture have been widely instilled here in Lahti.

Last week, Prime Minister Sanna Marin visited Japan, accompanied by Minister Skinnari. It is very significant that the strong ties between Japan and Finland have been confirmed at the summit level again.

I sincerely hope that this Sakura Park will be loved and cherished by Lahti citizens for a long time toward a future, and Ezoyamasakura saplings donated by Hokkaido Finland Society will take root firmly and flourish vibrantly in this park, symbolizing the friendship between Hokkaido and Lahti as well as between Japan and Finland.

Thank you.

(End)