

**Address by H.E. Ambassador FUJIMURA Kazuhiro
at the Occasion of the Second Sakura-Kielo Alumni Gathering
for MEXT+ JET Returnees from Japan
on 26 September 2022**

Hyvää iltaa, ja tervetuloa Sakura-Kielo Alumni-tapaamiseen. Olen Fujimura Kazuhiro, Japanin Suomen-suurlähettiläs. Hauska tavata teidät kaikki. Tilaisuudessamme on paikalla tänään myös entinen Suomen Japanin-suurlähettiläs Pekka Orpana ja rouva Paula Kuru-Orpana. Tervetuloa Pekkasan ja Paulasan.

Once again, thank you for coming to the second "Sakura and Kielo Alumni Gathering". I call this meeting the "Sakura-Kielo Alumni Gathering" because both Sakura, cherry blossom (kirsikkakukka) and Kielo, lily of the valley (suzuran) are beautiful national flowers of Japan and Finland. I believe that they well symbolize friendly relations between our two countries. I hosted the first gathering in June. This is the second one.

This year, our Embassy has been organizing various events including photo exhibitions under the theme of the "Finnish Japanese Friendship Year 2022". This "Sakura-Kielo Alumni Gathering" is also one of them. The "Finnish Japanese Friendship Year" originates from an event that occurred 230 years ago.

In 1792, thanks to tremendous support by Erik Laxman, a Finnish naturalist, Daikokuya Kodayu, a Japanese sailor whose ship had been wrecked and drifted to Siberia, successfully returned to Japan. This was the first Japanese-Finnish encounter. This year 2022 marks the 230th anniversary of Kodayu's return home.

It is all of you gathering here today who will develop the warm friendship between Japan and Finland over 200 years. During this Friendship year, Prime Minister Sanna Marin visited Japan in May. And last week in New York President Niinistö and Prime Minister Kishida got together at the United Nations. Our Embassy will promote exchanges not only between the Leaders but also between the young people of the two countries, who will lead the next generation through the Working Holiday Agreement between the two countries signed last May and various events like this gathering.

I hope that today's event will deepen exchanges among all the participants and serve as an opportunity for further development of friendship between the two countries. I also wish that this will motivate you to take any initiative to launch a kind of alumni association.

Tonight, my dear friend, composer and pianist Maestro KAWAKAMI Mine, is here with us. Let's start a wonderful soirée with her beautiful piano performance.

Kiitos.