

As delivered

**Speech at a Ceremony to commemorate the Bestowal of
The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays
upon Ms Heidi Caroline Potter, OBE
at the Embassy of Japan
by Ambassador Koji Tsuruoka
on Tuesday, 13 September 2016**

Good evening, everyone. Thank you very, very much for coming on this very warm day. Having lived in Tokyo for the last 15 years, I would not say it's hot! But I think the weather has also given us a memorable day – a very warm day! Indeed, we have the audience, the attendees at this reception, from many corners of the United Kingdom, and the Japanese community of course, and I am very, very touched that this represents the warmth, the depth and the breadth of Japan-UK relations, which have been produced, maintained and promoted further by none other than Heidi Potter. This is why we are here today. Let me give you some short remarks because this is a very auspicious occasion in that the Emperor is acknowledging the contribution of Heidi, as all of you here do. It is my duty as Ambassador to be serious from time to time, and I would like to provide you with the full background of how the Government of Japan and the Emperor reached this decision. It is my great pleasure to welcome all of you today to pay tribute to Heidi Caroline Potter for her sterling work in enhancing the important friendship between Japan and the UK.

In fact, Heidi visited me soon after my appointment and arrival in London with Sir David, both representing the Japan Society, and fully informed me about the activities the Society is engaged in, before I was to attend the annual Japan Society meeting. Indeed, I became very familiar with the important activities of the Society. As this year marks the 125th anniversary of the Japan Society's foundation, I think it is particularly appropriate to celebrate Heidi's contribution to the Japan-UK relationship throughout her professional life on this occasion.

It is also noteworthy that she was deservedly included in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2016, receiving an OBE for her services to UK-Japan relations to date. I haven't asked my staff this question, but it seems that the British Government awards the OBE, before *we* award the Japanese order! This is good because they are mutually reinforcing.

Heidi's dedication to this noble cause can be traced back to the time when she was studying Japanese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She subsequently joined the British English Teachers Scheme, known as BETS, which was the forerunner of the Japan Exchange and Teaching, or JET, Programme. Since then she has been tireless in promoting the JET Programme among young people. She thus well merited the Foreign Minister's Commendation, which she was awarded on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the JET Programme in 2006.

After she returned to the UK, she made a great contribution to educational and cultural exchange, especially by helping to organise the first large-scale Japanese festival in London in 1991. That's a long time ago! That mammoth undertaking led to the establishment of the Japan Festival Education Trust, a charitable organisation with the aim of maintaining the education-related activities inspired by the Japan Festival. The Trust was later renamed "Japan 21". Heidi was appointed as its Executive Director in 1992, in which role she organised various education-related activities to promote teaching about Japan at primary and secondary schools in the UK as well as supplying information related to Japan. This is much appreciated, because I know there are many people who are wise and experienced in terms of age, but we – and I also, of course – have received senior citizen status that gives me discounts for going to museums, which I appreciate, but we need to continue to invest in the future. What is the future? Children, the schoolchildren. And they are the ones who will promote education further, and we owe it to them to introduce to them the richness and the wealth of Japan-UK relations, languages included.

So, with her strong background in supporting Japan-UK ties through education, she was appointed the Chief Executive of the Japan Society when it merged with Japan 21 in 2007. The Society has thus benefited greatly from her experience at Japan 21 and from her years of devotion to nurturing bilateral ties at the grassroots level via cultural and educational exchange. I was particularly interested to learn about the “Japan in Your Classroom” scheme which the Society launched in 1991 under the umbrella of Japan 21, which has provided free school visits by trained Japanese volunteers to introduce Japanese culture to children in primary and secondary schools in the UK, and has reached over 100,000 pupils. Moreover, with the Japan Society Heidi has organised a range of other activities, including lectures by academics or specialists in relevant fields, and has spearheaded the Society’s role as a partner in cultural events such as Japan Matsuri, which this year is due to be held at the now well-established location of Trafalgar Square on the 25th of this month. Of course, I will be there, and I am looking forward to addressing to you on that important occasion.

Thus, in the light of her longstanding contribution to the strengthening of friendship and mutual understanding between Japan and the United Kingdom, it gives me great pleasure to confer upon Ms Heidi Potter the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays. I am sure that she will continue to feature prominently in efforts to promote UK-Japan relations further.

Thank you, Heidi, and many congratulations!