

As delivered

**Speech at Parliament Event – 30th Anniversary of
the Japan Exchange & Teaching (JET) Programme
in The Cholmondeley Room and Terrace,
House of Lords
by Ambassador Koji Tsuruoka
on Thursday 16 March 2017**

Good evening, everyone.

It is my pleasure to be here with you and I am humbled by the impressive turnout that I see here tonight. This is a wonderful occasion to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the JET Programme and I am especially grateful to those who have travelled from far afield to join us. Of course, I have to thank my very good friend Mr Roger Godsiff for hosting this event and making the facilities available. I would also like to offer my gratitude to Baroness D'Souza, who has always been a very good friend of Japan.

I just wanted to say a few words to congratulate all those who have helped the JET Programme to reach this incredible milestone. The programme was originally established with the intention of providing Japanese schoolchildren with the chance to interact with native English speakers. The UK was one of the founding countries and the total number of British JETs who have gone to Japan is over 10,000. This is a significant number indeed, and we can be confident when we say that we have laid a solid foundation for cooperation and friendship between Japan and the UK. However, there is one point that is not often understood. Most JET participants are not sent to major cities like Tokyo or Osaka but to the very distant corners of Japan, including places I have never been to myself.

Children growing up in the far-flung corners of Japan have lived their entire lives surrounded by other Japanese people and may never have had the opportunity to speak to someone from another country. If they have to wait until the age of twenty-two, they may encounter a psychological obstacle when it comes to communicating with people from other backgrounds. It is by having

the opportunity to interact with JETs that they realise you can be friends with people regardless of their ethnicity, nationality or religion.

The language of friendship is something that is common to all people. Whether they know it or not, each and every JET participant has had a profound impact on the people in their host community, and I cannot thank them enough for keeping this amazing scheme running for three decades. I am pleased to see that more and more young people from the UK are applying for the chance to work in Japan on the JET Programme. Perhaps one reason is that Japan will be hosting the 2019 Rugby World Cup, and I know that we have some enthusiastic rugby fans in the room tonight. Moreover, in 2020 Tokyo will have the honour of hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games. We hope that we can follow in London's footsteps and use the Games as an opportunity to revitalise Japan as a whole.

I believe that those applying for the JET Programme are excited at the prospect of seeing these major sporting occasions in Japan, and you are all more than welcome to join us. The Rugby World Cup will see matches taking place across the entire country, and I hope it will help to attract more young people from the UK to Japan. These events also epitomise the values of friendship and cooperation, which are the basis for any international partnership. I would like to finish by reiterating my congratulations to everyone involved in enabling the JET Programme to reach its thirtieth year. May I also pay tribute to the members of the JET Alumni Association for keeping the spirit of the JET Programme alive long after they have returned to the UK. The last three decades would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of everybody here in this room, and I offer you my sincerest thanks for coming here tonight.

Thank you.