

As delivered

**Speech at the Annual General Meeting of the Japan Society
at the Embassy of Japan
by Ambassador Koji Tsuruoka
on Wednesday 18 July 2018**

Sir David, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be able to welcome all of you here to the Embassy for this year's Annual General Meeting of the Japan Society. Since we met here a year ago, Japan-UK relations have continued to unfold in a very positive direction. As always, the Japan Society has supported this positive trend with its variety of cultural, educational and other events and initiatives. Thanks to your efforts and to those of many other people, I think we have been very successful in improving our lengthy relationship.

As you know, Prime Minister May visited Japan last August, and the meeting produced an agreement to hold what we are now calling the Season of Culture, from the Rugby World Cup next year to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. These are two important global events. In the UK the Season aims to showcase Japan's multi-faceted appeal, from its culture and art to innovation and cutting-edge technology in areas such as medicine, science and industry. By building on various areas of grassroots exchange and local community activities that already exist, we hope to use the momentum of the Japan Season of Culture to create a legacy that will endure in its aftermath.

One such initiative which comes under this umbrella is the Sakura Cherry Tree Planting Project in the UK, whereby cherry trees will be planted in a number of prominent locations, including some of the Royal Parks. I know that Heidi has been active in approaching schools where trees can be planted in this regard. In fact, my dream is for British people to gather under the cherry trees when they blossom in the springtime, just like people do in Japan, and to celebrate the beauty of the trees by engaging in *hanami* with the help of Japanese sake and sushi!

One more thing I need to mention, and this is also something which has been achieved through the assistance of the Japan Society, is the opening of Japan House London on Kensington High Street. If you haven't had the time to visit yet, I sincerely recommend you to take a trip there. It isn't too far from the tube station and is very easily accessible. I myself was happily surprised that this Japanese Government-funded project could come up with such a fantastic taste of Japan. So if you visit Japan House I am sure that you will not be wasting your time. It's a very nice space, and from the architecture and design you can get a real sense of modern Japan.

So, a number of things have happened over the course of the last year. Today, one of our purposes is to vote on the leadership of the Society from next year onwards. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Sir David for his tireless efforts in chairing our precious organisation. He will certainly be a tough act to follow, but I am confident that his successor, Mr Bill Emmott will serve the Society very well.

My thanks once again to Heidi and Sir David, and congratulations to Mr Emmott. The Society is in excellent health, and I look forward to maintaining my keen involvement in its activities in the months and years ahead.

Thank you all for coming.