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Speech on the Occasion of the Bestowal of the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star upon The Lord Rees of Ludlow at the Embassy of Japan by Ambassador Keiichi Hayashi on Monday 14 December 2015

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to today's ceremony and reception as we confer upon The Lord Rees of Ludlow the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star in recognition of his significant contribution to strengthening and developing academic relations between Japan and the United Kingdom, especially in the field of astronomy.

What good timing it is to celebrate space cooperation between Japan and the UK! Just last Friday evening we welcomed back Japanese Astronaut Kimiya Yui to Earth upon his completion of his 142-day mission at the International Space Station, while tomorrow British Astronaut Tim Peake will be departing for a seven-month stay at the same ISS. And the much-acclaimed new 'Star Wars' film will have its world premiere today, although in reality we are more interested in peace among the stars.

To rely on the film's famous line, "A long time ago, in a region far, far away", Japan-UK collaboration in the field of astronomy began. It began with the gift of a silver telescope from King James I presented to the then-leader of the Shogunate in 1613. This was apparently the first ever telescope to arrive in Asia and highly impressed the Japanese. It was among the first examples of Japan being inspired by British achievements in science.

Four hundred years on we are here to recognise the scientific achievements of a figure equally inspirational. Lord Rees is a Fellow of Trinity College and Emeritus Professor of Cosmology and Astrophysics at the University of Cambridge and holds the honorary title of Astronomer Royal. He is one of the most prominent leaders in the world in the field of astronomy and physics, including that on black hole formation and extragalactic radio sources.

As the reference to an SF film tellingly suggests, my knowledge in this field is so limited that I cannot even properly cite his achievements, titles, positions and medals, which are literally as many as the stars. However, as a layman I am simply awed by the fact that Lord Rees has an asteroid named after him, 4587 Rees. Lord Rees's achievements also include his significant contribution towards promoting Japan-UK collaboration in the field of science. Today I would like to attempt to introduce just a few of his many outstanding contributions as we look back on his long and distinguished career.

Firstly, during his ten years as Director at Cambridge University's Institute of Astronomy, Lord Rees played an instrumental role in welcoming and teaching many Japanese researchers. Indeed, his contribution to Japanese research can be seen today in the achievements of Professor Masanori Iye, from the National Astronomical Observatory, and Professor Shin Mineshige, from Kyoto University, who conducted research alongside him at Cambridge.

Lord Rees also spent time at Kyoto University in his role as a visiting researcher of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), and his collaboration with Japanese research

continues to this day.

Much of Lord Rees's outstanding work has also been shared with Japan's general public through a number of books and lectures, such as "Our Cosmic Habitat" or "Universe". Written with simplicity and eloquence, these books enabled many young people in Japan to appreciate the wonders of space. We were also privileged here at the Embassy of Japan to enjoy a speech from Lord Rees at a Symposium that we held back in 2013 as we commemorated 150 years of the first academic exchange between Japan and the UK.

During his time as the President of the Royal Society from 2005 to 2010, he helped to further develop collaboration with the Science Council of Japan, alongside its President, Kiyoshi Kurokawa, and his successor, Ichiro Kanazawa. They worked together to discuss the role that academia can play in global issues, and their efforts included the publication of a joint statement aimed at the G8 Summit held in Japan in 2008. A workshop between the two institutions also led discussions on the various social impacts of science and technology, and helped to further promote bilateral cooperation in this field.

He has also played a key role in the Science and Technology in Society (STS) Forum, held annually in Japan, helping not only to prepare agendas, select speakers and promote the Forum among British scientists but also by visiting Japan to attend the Forum in person, and chairing a number of high-level meetings and discussions. His efforts in strengthening such links helped to lay the foundations for the thriving UK-Japan collaboration that we enjoy in the field of science today.

Lord Rees has also made a crucial contribution to Japan by his role in the establishment of the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University, where he provided his invaluable experience and international perspective as a member of the Governing Board for a number of years.

Lord Rees has thus been a key player in the academic exchange of our two countries. Isaac Newton once observed, "Men build too many walls and not enough bridges." But like a handful of great men, Lord Rees has built a solid bridge between the UK and Japan and their peoples in the academic arena.

In light of such an outstanding contribution, it now gives me great honour and pleasure to present Lord Rees with this very well-deserved award. I am sure not only all of you here but also many in Japan and the UK will join me in celebrating this award. Thank you very much and many congratulations.