

As delivered

**Speech on the Occasion of the Bestowal of the Order of the Rising Sun,
Gold and Silver Star upon the Lord Cunningham of Felling
at the Embassy of Japan
by Ambassador Koji Tsuruoka
on Thursday, 14 July, 2016**

Good evening everyone. We are gathered here this evening for a very happy occasion I am very, very happy and glad particularly because this is a celebration for a great friend, Lord Cunningham who soon after we met allowed me to call him Jack. Indeed it was barely a week after my arrival that Jack welcomed me in the House of Lords, where else of course. He's given me a story about how he had lived through his political career that goes beyond 40 years. And for the newcomer to London, someone who's never served in the UK nor has been Ambassador in the past, this story was really very, very enlightening and I thank Jack for spending more than an hour telling me his life in politics in the UK before the 23 June, and I had taken hints of various developments since that time. I happened to have the impression at the time that Jack is a person that brings everyone together.

Today we have many distinguished members of Westminster, the UK parliament. They come from different corners and different parties and this is the value of having the group which we call the 21st Century Group between the UK and Japan, not becoming one party politics. It is a bipartisan, all-inclusive, comprehensive approach because Japan and the UK have a comprehensive relationship. It's on the basis of sharing values, sharing objectives – common objectives for global good – that we have been able to work, and this group has been ongoing for more than 20 years. And of course our friend Jack has steered it for 5 years with excellent results.

Since I have been instructed by my Emperor to mention and make certain why he has desired to award this decoration to Jack, I have to go through the records – the brilliant records of Lord Cunningham – that have reached us to this day. He served as the UK Chair to the UK-Japan 21st Century Group between 2004 and 2011, and even after his resignation from that position continued as one of its active members. The UK-Japan 21st Century Group is a leading forum of knowledgeable people both from Japan and from the UK from business leaders, academics, journalists to politicians who gather once a year, alternating between London and Tokyo, to discuss how best we can and should cooperate in terms of bilateral relations as well as to discuss global issues.

The room today is filled with people who have had many contacts and dealings with, and will have future contact with the 21st Century Group, and this is really an award that through Lord Cunningham the Japanese Emperor is giving praise to the work of the 21st Century Group. Now this was established some time ago – this was in 1985 – by the first lady Prime Minister of the UK, Margaret Thatcher and Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. I think he's approaching age 100, he's still going strong, well and strong in Tokyo. So, it is a tradition started in 1985, we are going beyond 30 years. Now this group was able to make a large contribution on bilateral and global issues as well. The contribution owes a lot to Lord Cunningham. He devoted his energy during his chairmanship. Though busy, he never failed to attend the group's annual conference with his Japanese counterparts and did his best to put the group's recommendations into practice, often drawing on his experience in the Cabinet. According to the joint statement of the group, issued on the occasion of its 25th anniversary meeting held in 2007, the awkwardness and reticence among participants evident in the early years of the group was no longer a feature of this discussion and each participant now felt that he or she could discuss things frankly and openly. This is again representative of the chair's leadership in bringing people together to be frank with each other and try to work together towards a common goal. And this is indeed the achievements that Jack has made possible.

During those years Lord Cunningham was also working closely with Japanese counterparts to have the two countries engage more in global issues. He felt it particularly important that the group embody the policy orientation the two countries were pursuing during his chairmanship. As a result, the reconstruction efforts in Iraq, cooperation on development in Africa and climate change were issues on which our two countries started working on together in a more concrete manner. The new phase of bilateral cooperation was given symbolic backing in 2008 as Japan and the UK celebrated the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties.

Having started his career as a chemist (he reminded me) while many of his family members have moved away from science, he told me that one of his beloved daughters, while starting her career in science, eventually moved into something more profitable – and you can't blame them. However, starting from science, I think, is a very good way of starting your career, because I think objectivity is the basis of science and Jack has the impulse for always continuing to maintain that. Now, of course Jack's career includes Sellafield, one the UK's major nuclear power generation sites, and he has been familiar with the Japanese players in nuclear power generation since his early days as a politician. Because of these ties, he has established longstanding friendships with many Japanese business people. Most of them unfortunately could not attend this reception because they are far away, but their hearts I'm sure are with Lord Cunningham because he has nurtured friendship through more than 40 years of public service and he made many visits to Japan. It's not just Tokyo, he's been around in Japan and he also enjoyed visiting many places. All these personal experiences have been presented as a huge contribution to move the bilateral relationship even further.

Therefore, it is my great pleasure to confer upon Lord Cunningham the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star.

Thank you, and many congratulations!

(End)