

As delivered

**Speech on the Occasion of the 21st Annual Summer Reunion for
Peace and Friendship
at the Embassy of Japan
by Ambassador Koji Tsuruoka
on Monday 19 June 2017**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for coming in this rather warm weather.

You may remember that just about one year ago I was here for the 20th Annual Reunion. This year we are celebrating the 21st gathering of peace and friendship and I would like to say a few words on how I cherish this reception.

One year is a long time, and throughout the calendar year the Embassy hosts a number of events and numerous receptions, many of them held in this very room. But I have to say this is the most important reception.

Now, if someone had to pass an exam to become an ambassador and the question was ‘Which is the most important reception for the Embassy?’, the obvious answer would be our Emperor’s Birthday Reception because that’s our National Day. But this one is also important – more than any other receptions or events this Embassy hosts throughout the year. I have been very much looking forward to seeing you again, and I am so happy and glad that you have all been able to join us again on this occasion.

Looking around the room, I’ve already noticed that you are enjoying meeting up again with friends and enjoying this great reunion. In fact, this is the only reception we are calling a ‘reunion’. Of course, there are many regular attendees at Embassy receptions, but this one is very special. I think there are three reasons why I regard this one as the most important.

Firstly, it's personal. The Emperor's Birthday reception is official and, of course, this one is official as well because it is sponsored by the Japanese Government. However, considering the people who are here and the intention of the Government, this one is personal because it involves a matter of the heart, a matter of how people feel and how people remember. I don't think there is anything more important than how future generations feel, what is in their hearts. Therefore this is why I feel this reception is so important.

Secondly, this event is now in its 21st year. This wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for the tireless and selfless efforts of many people that have come before me. Of course, my official predecessors have played their part, but the main impetus behind this event has come from people working in a private capacity. That includes you who are here tonight and those of you who have attended in the past. All of you have put so much energy and effort into bringing about this very friendly reunion. That is why the second important reason is the great and selfless contribution of private individuals.

Thirdly – and this may not be so significant but it is up to you to make your own judgement – I think it is important because we are gathered here for the past, present and future.

The past: of course, we all have a past. There are people who have experienced more past than others – including myself, of course. The past cannot be erased or changed. The past is the past, and we must remember, we must acknowledge and we must understand. Most importantly, we must not forget.

The present: we are here right now. And it is a happy occasion when you see that this reunion has been made possible because of the present, excellent relationship between Japan and the UK. Recognising the great difficulties we have overcome and the suffering of many people in the past, I am really grateful that we ourselves are now friends and I want to thank you very much for treating us as your friends.

The future: the past and present have to be the basis for an even better future. Japan and the UK are totally committed to a vision of a bright and promising future.

I don't have to tell you that this year extra efforts have been made by certain individuals who have worked very hard to continue their mission for peace and friendship.

One such person is The Reverend Professor Kemmyo Sato, Director of the Three Wheels New Buddhist Temple. He participated in an interfaith consultation in Myanmar, hosted by the Church of the Province of Myanmar, with the participation of both the Christian and the Buddhist communities. Some officials of the Myanmar Embassy are here with us tonight, and we welcome you to this very happy and important reunion.

Meanwhile, last month the Burma Campaign Society participated in memorial services organised by Manipur State and its local volunteer groups to commemorate the 73rd anniversary of the Battle of Imphal. Mr Kenji Hiramatsu, Japanese Ambassador to India, attended the event and delivered a speech, along with Mr Biren Singh, the Chief Minister of Manipur State, and Ms Akiko MacDonald, the Chairman of the Society, whose father was among the survivors of the conflict. She has brought with her tonight the person who fought against her father on the other side.

So again, we are looking at the past but trying to make the present agreeable enough and also trying to make a better future. At the same time, there are some friends who have left us over the past year.

One of them was Sir Harold Atcherley, to whom I also pay tribute. In 2015 Sir Harold, a former PoW, invited to London a Japanese railway engineer who had worked on the Burma-Thailand railway and his family, about whom he had come to know through a BBC special programme featuring that Japanese soldier. The encounter happened solely due to his personal initiative towards

reconciliation, and their handshake after 70 years was widely reported in the Japanese and the British press. May we forever keep Sir Harold in our memories.

Of course, the bilateral relationship today between Japan and the UK is really solid and truly flourishing, based on our shared fundamental values. This reflects to a large degree the efforts of many people over many years to launch this series of reunions. In this regard, I must mention Mr Masao Hirakubo, who left us some time ago, and Mrs Keiko Holmes, who is with us tonight: two people to whom we owe so much for having worked so hard and selflessly.

I came to this event one year ago, and honestly I have to confess I have not done anything to further these reunions because the basis is already in place thanks to the hard work of individuals who had offered their resources, their time and their energy to make them happen. I can only express my sincere gratitude to you all. I know that many of you have travelled long distances just to attend this reception, and it cannot have been easy to come all the way to London in this hot weather, but I am very glad that you have managed to be present here and to enjoy the evening in the company of your friends.

As a small token of gratitude, we have prepared some sake! In hot weather, cold sake is really good. There are some small Japanese dishes as well, so please enjoy them. Finally, I would like to propose a toast: may we all be reunited next year, at this most important reception hosted by the Japanese Ambassador in London for the 22nd time, and may we enjoy good health and be in good spirits. Please join me in declaring *Kampai!*