

As delivered

**Speech at the Annual General Meeting of the Japan Society
at the Embassy of Japan
by Ambassador Koji Tsuruoka
on Wednesday 12 July 2017**

Thank you, [Sir] David [Warren]. Being President of the Japan Society is, I think, one of the most important duties for me as Ambassador. Right after my arrival I was fully informed of the activities of the Japan Society, and I was under the impression that I had been briefed on its activities because I was a newly appointed Ambassador, but it was more than that. I am the President of the Japan Society, so I asked once “Do you mean Honorary President?” I am not really sure what it would mean for me to be “Honorary”, but I am not “Honorary” – I am the President of the Society! So I am more than aware of my duty to ensure the success of the Japan Society. In fact, the Japan Society celebrated last year its 125th anniversary. This is quite a long time and I think we should all be very proud of it, especially the long-term members who have supported its activities. Of course, none of us was here 125 years ago, but many of us will continue to be here for many, many years to come.

I also learnt during the past year that the Japan Society in London is a very unique and special Japan Society; although we have Japan Societies, as you may imagine, around the world, this is quite unique. First, it is the oldest, and second, it is the only Japan Society that has received an endowment from Emperor Meiji. It shows the history, the uniqueness and the prestige of the Japan Society, and I am very proud to be the Society’s President. So you can count not just on me, because I am also the Ambassador, but on the assistance and support from the Japanese Embassy for the activities of the Japan Society.

In fact, the Japan Society has been for the past year very, very active in the area that it does very well, cultural exchange, and we have had a number of events

that we can remember most fondly and which have been extremely successful. I will not go through them here but I want to take this opportunity to just mention one future development that we are expecting, and that is in relation to Japan House. Japan House has not yet opened; we just had a media launch in May. It was a prelude to what we hope to achieve in the course of the early part of next year, the first half of next year. The site of Japan House will be on Kensington High Street – not because it is close to my residence, but because it is a newly thriving street. The Design Museum was built on one side, and there is also, as you may know, the Royal Albert Hall and the V&A in the neighbourhood. It is a very cultural place, and also a booming retail area of high quality. So this place was chosen to be the site for Japan House.

Now, Japan House, from the very concept, shouldn't be confused with the Japan Society. The collaboration between the two will improve the performance of both, and that is what I will be responsible for ensuring as the President of the Japan Society. Meanwhile, as the Ambassador I should also be held responsible for ensuring the success of the newly-created Japan House. I just wanted to mention this, because some of you may be interested in Japan House although I am afraid we cannot show it to you yet because it has not been completed. If you have any questions or if you are interested in learning about Japan House, Minister Iida is the minister responsible at the Embassy for Japan House – he has been spending 98% of his time on Japan House, and 2% on the Japan Society! This is because the Japan Society has 126 years of tradition and we are not intending to intrude or intervene into its successful activities. However, it is in a spirit of transparency and collaboration that I mentioned what we are currently trying to do concerning Japan House.

Let me add a few words about something that happened in the course of last year in connection with the 125th anniversary. That was the decoration the Japanese Emperor decided to award [Ms] Heidi [Potter] for the very long term of service that she has provided to the Japan Society. It was deliberately chosen

to happen in the 125th year because it was a commemorative occasion, and I of course hosted a reception here as well as a dinner in her honour. I just wanted to share this with you because, of course, it was to mark the personal commitment, sacrifice and contribution that Heidi has made to the promotion of the Japan-UK broader relationship. But it was also in recognition of the contribution of the Japan Society. And Heidi, of course, is the person who is instrumental in keeping the Society moving, and therefore it was my honour – I just happened to be the Ambassador in the 125th year – it was, indeed, my privilege and honour to award Ms Heidi Potter with the Japanese decoration. So I just wanted to reconfirm for the record of the past year that this was a significant event that we were able to hold here at the Embassy. Thank you – and again, look forward, because a Japanese “decoration” is not a word that recognises the end of service. It is an award to ensure that the work will continue, even with double or triple efforts on the part of the individual who receives it, and she was chosen for this! Thank you again, Heidi, and thank you, David.