

Remarks by H. E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime.
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
for Paralympic Heritage Flame Lighting Ceremony
at Stoke Mandeville, UK
on Thursday, August 19, 2021

Lady Howe,
Distinguished Guests,

It is my great pleasure and honour to attend the Paralympic Heritage Flame Lighting Ceremony as a representative of Japan.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games started almost a month ago, on 23rd July. While the entire project to host the Games has faced great challenges, I am delighted that we have been able to hold them in a largely safe and secure manner as a symbol of human dignity in overcoming the obstacles caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the great support we received from all over the world in making the Games take place.

I feel privileged to be here at Stoke Mandeville, which is recognized as the birthplace of the Paralympic movement, stemming from the dedication of Professor Sir Ludwig Guttman, who organised the first competition for wheelchair athletes in 1948. Sixteen years later, in 1964, building on the momentum created here, the Tokyo 1964 Games took place, comprising the first occasion featuring the use of the term ‘Paralympics’. With Sir Ludwig Guttman in attendance, the Tokyo 1964 Paralympics had an enormous positive impact on how people with disabilities were perceived in Japan.

Reflecting these important legacies, the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games starting next week will make Tokyo the first city ever to host this great event on two separate occasions.

The Games will feature 22 sports taking place at 21 venues, with badminton and taekwondo included for the first time. I have no doubt that

people around the world will be enormously impressed by the skill, speed, strength and passion demonstrated by the competitors.

It is hoped that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games will not only provide excitement but will also trigger social changes. In fact, one of the key concepts of Tokyo 2020 is 'Unity in Diversity'. A positive trend in this regard is already happening in Japan in that steady improvements are being under way enhancing accessibility for people with physical challenges. Furthermore, wide exposure to Para sports in the making of Tokyo 2020 has greatly helped create an atmosphere of inclusiveness. I hope the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games will inspire children and young people with a sense of what can be achieved by the power of sport, and that the Games will become a major catalyst for Japan and the world to embrace diversity even further.

In closing, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the organizers of this Flame Lighting Ceremony, who have kept the light of hope shining through the generations. Via the flame which will be lit soon, uplifting and noble vision inherited here at Stoke Mandeville, will surely be shared with people in Japan and those around the world.

Thank you for your kind attention.