

Remarks by Ambassador HAYASHI Hajime
for the Sakura Cherry Trees Planting Ceremony
at Capel Manor College on 2nd September, 2021

Lord and Lady Salisbury, Principal Goodwin, Distinguished Guests,

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you this morning and to have taken part in the ceremonial planting of cherry trees, indeed such a heart-warming occasion. Since I arrived in the UK in early February this year, this is honestly the first planting ceremony in which I have been involved. I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to Lord and Lady Salisbury for deciding to take part in this special project. It is highly significant that Capel Manor College, a specialist environmental college with a distinguished history, has become a site for planting cherry trees. Also let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work by the Founder and Joint Chairman Mr Keisaku Sano as well as the members of the Sakura Cherry Tree Project, who have brought this whole venture to fruition.

As a visible symbol of the relationship between Japan and the UK, the Sakura Cherry Tree Project has been highlighted as one of the flagship schemes under the Japan Season of Culture in the UK. Based on an agreement between our two Prime Ministers, Japan and the UK designated the years 2019 and 2020 for the Japan-UK Season of Culture, a venture bridging the Rugby World Cup 2019 and the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Due to the pandemic, we decided to extend the project for another year, until the end of this year. Across the country we now have about 1200 Japan-related events organised under the umbrella of the Season. It is most gratifying to learn how many grassroots activities have been taking place and how much interest there is in Japan despite all the Covid-related restrictions.

It seems to me that the hallowed place of sakura in the hearts of Japanese people is well known. Cherry trees are a part of life as one grows up in Japan. Spring is the time when the new school year starts there. Attending momentous events such as school entrance and graduation ceremonies, one always sees sakura blooming on campus and across the neighbourhood. I

hope that these sakura trees will add a burst of colour to the spring for the students of Capel Manor College as in Japan in the years to come.

Looking back over the history of cherry blossoms and how they became known in the UK, I am struck by the keen contribution made by the people here. Indeed, Capel Manor College, where horticulture experts and enthusiasts gather, is a perfect place for sakura trees to be planted for this project. I am fascinated that, thanks to the efforts of everyone involved in this project to plant over 7,000 cherry trees, such trees are likely to become a part of the lives of British people. These trees will grow stronger and more matured each year when they blossom. I hope they bring joy to people across the UK and remind them of the deep friendship between our two nations and peoples.

The pandemic and lockdown brought us so much sorrow and pain, but our presence here today means that we are almost overcoming the hardest part. It is certainly time for us to start anew together. Let's remember this ceremony today as an event that not only illustrates the depth and breadth of our relationship but also stands as a significant milestone for a brighter future.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.