

Remarks by H. E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime.
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
at the Oku Memorial Trophy Rugby Event 2021
on November 27, 2021

I am delighted to be here in Oxford with you all today at the Oku Memorial Trophy rugby event. It is heart-warming to know that the intense passion for rugby exhibited by Ambassador OKU Katsuhiko, who was tragically killed in the line of duty in Iraq in 2003, has touched and inspired his friends and colleagues as well as younger rugby players from both Japan and the UK

Katsu Oku was well known for his attachment to Oxford as well as his passion for rugby. I have no doubt that he would be very grateful for today's occasion, a precious opportunity to commemorate and celebrate his life, and I deeply appreciate the efforts of the organisers in making it a much-anticipated annual event.

This year, the Oku Memorial Trophy rugby event has the added element of the planting of cherry trees as part of the Sakura Tree Project. This is one of the flagship initiatives under the Japan-UK Season of Culture to foster an amicable bilateral relationship, which Katsu Oku worked so enthusiastically to bring about. I am fascinated that, thanks to the efforts of everyone involved in this project to plant over 7,000 cherry trees all over the UK, such trees are likely to become a part of the lives of the British people. As they mature and blossom each year, I trust they will 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. Although we still have uncertainty for the time being, I would like to believe, as our presence here today suggests, that we have largely overcome the hardest and the most difficult part. I hope we can remember today's occasion as a significant milestone on the road to a brighter future. I am quite sure that such a vision would perfectly accord with Katsu Oku's personality.

Thank you for your attention, and enjoy the match!