

Remarks by Ambassador HAYASHI Hajime
for the Sakura Cherry Trees Planting Ceremony
at Chartwell on 4th February, 2022

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 at such a prestigious site. I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to the administrators of Chartwell for deciding for this to be a venue of this special project. As a result, Chartwell, home to one of the most notable political figures in history, has become a site for our cherry tree planting venture. I feel so glad to see Ms Jennie Churchill is together with us on this occasion. Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of the members of the Sakura Cherry Tree Project Team. I recognize Lady Victoria Borwick and Mr HANAOKA Takaaki are also here with us. Without their arduous efforts and enthusiasm, the whole project would not have been possible.

The Sakura Cherry Tree Project was initiated on the basis of an agreement between our then-Prime Ministers of Japan and the UK, Mr ABE Shinzo and Lady Theresa May, in 2017. Since then as many as 7000 trees have been or are to be planted all over the UK. The project itself came to fruition because of our cordial bilateral relationship, reflecting the steadfast efforts of so many people devoted to contributing to an ever deeper friendship between us. Of course, we have achieved significant progress in a number of key areas including economy and security, but the most important foundation of our ties has been built through exchanges between people.

This interaction between Japan and the UK has led to many shared values and perspectives, not least our common respect and appreciation for the beauty of nature. That is exactly why these cherry trees are the perfect symbol of the enduring friendship between our two countries, and the reason why Chartwell is a perfect setting for this project.

Sir Winston Churchill is said to have loved the scenery surrounding this location. Chartwell must have been a home that could offer him comfort and healing after the hardship he went through as Prime Minister during one of the most trying times in this country's history. Although our two countries very unfortunately followed opposite directions at those times, such an affinity with nature is something with which many Japanese can readily identify.

Finally, I would like to share with you another episode that shows a personal connection between Japan and the UK at Chartwell. In 1954, the then-Japanese Prime Minister YOSHIDA Shigeru, a famous figure not only known as a political leader but also an anglophile in Japan, visited the UK and met Sir Winston Churchill. Mr YOSHIDA bestowed the gift of a drawing of Mt. Fuji, obviously which has long been a symbol of the country's natural beauty, drawn by one of the leading Japanese painters, YASUDA Yukihiro. Delighted with the gift, Sir Winston, who is also well known as an artist, displayed the picture at his residence in Chartwell. It is a great joy to know that this legacy of our two countries' friendship has been lovingly preserved at this very site to this day. And that makes it even more of an honour for me to be with you all here today for this cherry tree ceremony, which, I believe, will be yet another legacy to remain at this outstanding site for years to come.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.