

Distinguished Guests,

Good evening, and welcome to my residence.

I feel privileged to have the opportunity to honour Lady Victoria Borwick and The Sakura Cherry Tree Project Committee for their outstanding contribution to deepening the cherished relations between Japan and the UK.

Firstly, let me outline the professional achievements of Lady Borwick. Buoyed by her dedicated and engaging personality, she has forged an impressive political career. She started out as a councillor in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in 2002 and subsequently became an elected member of the Greater London Authority, serving as the Deputy Mayor of London from 2012 to 2015. She then served for two years as a Member of the House of Commons. Since then she has remained active in public life and is currently Chair of the Thames Estuary Partnership.

Alongside her involvement in public service, Lady Borwick has long been an enthusiastic supporter of Japan. For instance, she was a leading player in bringing about the construction of the delightful

Fukushima Garden in Holland Park, within 10 minutes walking distance from here. In fact, this precious haven in the heart of London would not exist without her efforts. More topically, she is a Deputy Chair of the Sakura Cherry Tree Project Committee, which is also being duly recognised on this occasion. She organises the logistics for planting cherry blossom trees across the UK and thus for planting the seeds of friendship with Japan in the hearts of the British people. I believe these seeds are set to flourish splendidly from now on.

As for The Sakura Cherry Tree Project, this magnificent initiative has played a prominent role in strengthening the ties between Japan and the UK since 2016. In fact, it was rightly stipulated in the UK-Japan Joint Statement in 2017, which proved the appreciation it gained between the two prime ministers of both our countries. Over 7,000 cherry blossom trees have already been planted and I have heard that you are aiming to reach 10,000 in the near future. What a massive number! Thanks to your efforts, the sakura cherry tree, that quintessential symbol of Japan, has turned into a symbol of the cordial ties between Japan and the UK. It is noteworthy that this symbol lives longer than human and continues to increase its attraction as a tree grows.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the companies and individuals who have donated time and resources to this project. These include the property owners and corporate managers who have accepted the sakura cherry trees and, most of all, the members of the project who have faithfully carried out their respective tasks, under the leadership of Mr Sano, such as the fundraising, networking, logistics and promotion needed to make this scheme a success.

The Foreign Minister's Commendation recognises those individuals and organisations who have made notable achievements in promoting friendly ties between Japan and other countries in various fields. Needless to say, Lady Borwick and The Sakura Cherry Tree Project Committee perfectly deserve this esteemed honour. It therefore gives me great pleasure to join you today in congratulating these worthy recipients of the Foreign Minister's Commendation.

I trust Lady Borwick and the Sakura Cherry Tree project will continue their efforts to further UK-Japan friendship. I look forward to continuing to work with you to promote greater awareness and understanding of Japanese culture among British people, thereby

further strengthening the amicable ties between our two countries and peoples.

Congratulations, Lady Borwick, and The Sakura Cherry Tree Project Committee.

Thank you indeed.