

Remarks by Ambassador HAYASHI Hajime
For the Japan House London Annual Members' Event 2023
On Wednesday, 1 March 2023

Good evening,

It's a great pleasure to see you all today.

Before asking everyone to join me in a toast, I would like to say a few words.

Looking back on UK-Japan relations over the past year, it is noteworthy that Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress visited the UK last September to attend the state funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elisabeth II and that Prime Minister Kishida visited the UK last May. Despite his tight schedule, Prime Minister Kishida made a point of visiting Japan House London and showed great interest in finding out what goes on here. His subsequent visit at the beginning of this year started with a summit meeting held at the historic Tower of London, where a set of samurai armour, the first official gift from Japan and thus a symbol of the 400-year history of the friendship between our two countries, is displayed. On that occasion Prime Minister Kishida and Prime Minister Sunak signed the “Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement” to further elevate security and defense cooperation.

Japan House London has also experienced some major events in recent months. Among others, it was a major development when Mr Sam Thorne took over as Director General from Mr Mike Houlihan in October. About four months have now passed since Sam took office. He has been exchanging views with many different stakeholders with a clear strategy for the further development of JHL, and is very excited about what lies ahead.

I understand that all JHL's exhibitions, including the one on Hida woodworking, which finished at the end of January, and that focusing on kumihimo, which just started last month, have been very well received. JHL has enjoyed healthy visitor numbers, which have returned to 80% of pre-COVID levels and are expected to grow even more in the not too distant future. More importantly, JHL has been successfully introducing audiences to the diverse attractions of Japan, including those places other than Tokyo, Kyoto or Mount Fuji, through exhibitions, events and shops.

Though the Covid-19 pandemic posed challenges for many cultural institutions, JHL has responded to these daunting circumstances by strengthening its online communication and is now aiming to become a hub for conveying Japan's attractions not only to the UK but also to Europe and the rest of the world.

These developments at JHL would not have been possible without your generous contributions.

The Embassy would also like more and more people to know about JHL and its activities, and last month I hosted a reception to celebrate the Emperor's birthday here for the first time ever. With the help of JHL's corporate partners, we also set up booths featuring Japanese companies active in the UK and their cutting-edge technologies, which impressed the many distinguished guests with their confidence in the potential of the UK and Japan to address their common challenges.

Before concluding my remarks, with your indulgence, allow me to express my deep appreciation of the hard work of all the staff here.

Now, let me ask you to join me in a toast.

To the continued success of JHL and to the health and happiness of everyone taking part in this event today! Cheers! Kampai!

Thank you very much. I hope you fully enjoy the rest of the evening.