

Remarks by H.E. Mr HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the United Kingdom,
at the Reception for Farewell Reception
on 22nd October 2024

Good evening.

Thank you very much for attending today's farewell reception and sharing time with Haruko and myself. It is customary to say "Distinguished Guests," but this evening, it is truly "Distinguished Guests." We have so many wonderful representatives from different parts and fields of the United Kingdom and British society, as well as representatives of many Japanese expatriates here in London and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

First and foremost, Haruko and I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to all of you for providing friendship, support, cooperation, and encouragement to both of us during our tenure of about four years here in the United Kingdom. We often talk to each other about how lucky and fortunate we have been to be in the United Kingdom as Ambassador and Ambassador's spouse during a time when the bilateral friendship and partnership have been on an upward trajectory, reaching perhaps the highest, unprecedented levels of partnership between our two countries. Of course, there are many backgrounds and reasons for this, but one of them is surely that our two countries and peoples have been working together since the mid-19th century. Our predecessors, along with many others, have built a foundation for us to work together today and into the future.

One of the background factors is, of course, Brexit. After leaving the European Union, the United Kingdom has been seeking and working with other international partners, including the EU. And here, we are two island democracies on opposite sides of the globe, sharing fundamental values—

freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—while also sharing strategic interests as two members of the G7. Both Japan and the United Kingdom cherish strong bonds with the United States. Under these circumstances, and given the more turbulent and uncertain international environment and serious challenges we face globally, it seems inevitable that countries like the United Kingdom and Japan should work closer to each other. Some may even describe today's partnership as being at its highest point since the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in the early 20th century.

Today, we are fortunate to have Lord Salisbury here with us. If I'm not mistaken, it was his great-great-grandfather who was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom when the alliance with Japan was signed in 1902. At that time, the head of the Embassy of Japan was Ambassador Hayashi, same family name! We coincidentally share this kind of links with each other.

Of course, the symbolic event this year was the State Visit of Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan. I was deeply moved, as was Haruko, by the heartwarming welcome extended to Their Majesties by so many people in the United Kingdom, led by His Majesty King Charles III and Queen Camilla, along with many other leaders and ordinary citizens' warm welcome and genuine hospitality. I vividly remember the first day of the official part of the State Visit, on June 25th, at Horse Guards Parade, where Their Majesties the King and Queen received the Emperor and Empress with wonderful hospitality. From Horse Guards, the parade traveled to Buckingham Palace through the Mall, with two national flags - the Union Jack and the Rising Sun- waving along the Mall. Many British citizens, Japanese expatriates, and even tourists waved small flags to welcome the parade. This is a memory that Haruko and I will never forget.

During our nearly four years here, we have witnessed many significant events, both politically and socially. I have had the opportunity to work with four Prime Ministers, five Chancellors of the Exchequer, and five Foreign Secretaries. I'm sorry, I can't remember exactly how many other

Secretaries of State and Ministers I've worked with. This reminds me of the fact that this is a country where people nurture and develop theatres, and the legacy of great figures like William Shakespeare continues to influence events even today. I often wonder which roles from Shakespeare's plays, like Richard III, Lady Macbeth, Brutus, or even Falstaff, are being played by today's political leaders in Westminster. Over the past four years, the most challenging event we faced was undoubtedly the pandemic and the associated lockdowns. We share a deep sympathy and our condolences with those who suffered from COVID and, of course, those who lost their lives. However, we were also very impressed by how swiftly and dynamically the United Kingdom invested in vaccine development. The United Kingdom was one of the first countries in the world to come out of the pandemic through a rapid and widespread vaccination rollout. I remember clearly standing in a long queue with fellow Londoners at the Science Museum in South Kensington to receive our vaccinations. It was a difficult but unforgettable experience for us.

Another deeply moving moment was the passing of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. It was a time of great sadness not only for all British citizens but for people around the world. But also, Haruko and I were fortunate to accompany His Majesty the Emperor to be at Westminster Hall for the lying-in-state ceremony. We witnessed many citizens standing in long lines, some waiting for more than a day, to pay their respects. This is another unforgettable memory from our time here in the United Kingdom.

Reflecting on all these unforgettable experiences, I have come to believe that while the United Kingdom is rich in history, heritage, and culture, it is the people who are its greatest asset. It is these people who will guide the country into the future, and with such individuals, I am confident that the United Kingdom will continue to thrive.

In three days, Haruko and I will return to Japan to begin the next chapter of our lives, both in the middle of 60s, aging society. Haruko may return to

university to teach psychology or human communication to the younger generation. As for myself, I have not yet decided what I will do next, but I hope to take a few weeks, or perhaps months, to relax and, unleashed from my professional responsibilities, fully enjoy my favorite pastimes, such as visiting hot springs in Japan like Hakone with mountains and lakes. We hope that our paths will cross again in the future. Until then, we wish everyone here good health and happiness.

Lastly, I would like to extend my gratitude to Zeno International Europe for providing the best quality wagyu beef this evening. Please enjoy the delicious steak and shabu-shabu.

Thank you very much.