

## **Ambassador's Remarks for Emperor's Birthday Reception, 2016**

At Bellevue Palace Bern  
November 23, 2016

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Good evening.

Welcome to the reception of our National Day, that is, our Emperor's Birthday. Thank you so much for joining us tonight to celebrate this very important event and to get a taste of the Japanese culture.

First of all, I am grateful to Ms. Noe Fröscher-Ito, for her beautiful solo of the Japanese and Swiss national anthems. Please give her a warm applause.

Having assumed the post as Ambassador of Japan in June this year, this is my first Emperor's Birthday reception in Switzerland. I have lived abroad for 14 years so far, and I feel that the longer I live overseas, the more I am appreciative of my home country. I am proud of our history, tradition and values that are deeply rooted in our everyday lives. Tonight, I would like to demonstrate a taste of our way of life including Japanese cuisine and I wish all of you would enjoy that.

The actual birthday of His Majesty the Emperor Akihito is the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December. He will turn 83 years old. We are celebrating his birthday tonight one month before. As we pray for good health and a long life of His Majesty as a symbol of the unity of the Japanese people, we wish long-lasting peace and prosperity not only for Japan but also for the rest of the world.

We are very much proud that the Japanese Imperial families have the longest history in the world. His Majesty Akihito is the 125<sup>th</sup> Emperor. He is loved and respected by all Japanese people and we are very much grateful that we share the fate of happiness and even difficulties with His Majesty.

Luckily, today's reception coincides with "Labour Thanksgiving Day", in Japan. It originates from "Niiname-Sai" or "Harvest Festival", which has been celebrated for many years. Niiname means the first harvests of the year. In a ritual ceremony at the Imperial Palace, the Emperor makes the season's first offering of freshly harvested rice to the gods. We are lucky today to be able to celebrate rich harvest by giving thanks to gods as well as His Majesty's birthday.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity as Ambassador of Japan to Switzerland and Liechtenstein, to do a quick review of the expanding relationships between our countries.

As for the Japanese-Swiss relations, I am very pleased to note that our partnership has been developing further since the celebration of the 150th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations two years ago. In September this year, a delegation of the members of Japan-Switzerland Parliamentary Friendship Group headed by Mr. Seishiro Eto from the Japanese House of Representatives visited Switzerland. They had fruitful talks with their Swiss counterparts as well as with representatives of the economic circle and the federal administration. The president of the Council of States, Mr. Raphaël Comte, who is present here today, recently visited Japan as well.

Japan and Switzerland share many common interests and similar perspectives on global issues and challenges. We

work closely together on a wide range of issues like regional security, human rights, sustainable economic developments, and the rule of law. My first impression to live here is that we have a very good chemistry.

The relations in trade and investment are also strong. Since the conclusion of the Economic Partnership Agreement, or Japan-Swiss EPA in 2009, the third meeting of the Joint Committee established under this Agreement was held in Tokyo in October this year. Economic ties are underpinned by the activities of business associations such as the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce.

The cultural exchange between the two countries has also a long history. Thanks to the support of dedicated volunteers and institutions like Swiss Japan Society, mutual interest in each other's culture has been growing every year. Our embassy exhibits some of the traditional Japanese culture like Ikebana and Tea ceremony as well as the pop culture like Animation or "Anime" at the Japan Information and Cultural Centre or JICC located just next to the Embassy building. Please feel free to drop in there at any time.

As for the relations with the Principality of Liechtenstein, we have improved contacts and widened the scope of exchange and look forward to active developments in coming years. I remember that the Liechtenstein Art Exhibition in Tokyo in 2012 was extremely popular.

Japan plays an active role in consultations on global economy and international politics. We hosted the G7 Ise-Shima summit in May this year, where G7 leaders have been committed to leading to the global economic growth, particularly, by applying active fiscal policy together with monetary easing policy. Actually, up until the time to complete the G7 Ise-Shima summit towards the end of May, I had worked as an economic advisor to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, aiming at sustainable economic growth through

the bold policy package called “Abenomics” and I am glad to see closer international economic cooperation and commitment at G7 although there will be some risks that we have to tackle ahead of us.

Japan is so determined to regain the economic vitality by overcoming a chronic disease of deflation as early as possible, leading to the sustainable economic growth. In parallel, we are also determined to address fundamental issues such as demographic problems. Those efforts should encourage Japanese companies to expand their businesses also in Europe.

In fact, I am pleased to note that a number of Japanese companies have successfully established their businesses in Europe and contributed to the diversity of the local economies. I respect their hard work and would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Federal and Local authorities for their fairness, openness, and hospitality extended to foreign investors, including Japanese companies.

Last but not least, I would like to emphasize how much the Japanese communities both in Switzerland and Liechtenstein have contributed to deepening friendship between our counties. There are more than ten thousand Japanese nationals living in these countries and they are playing an essential role as indispensable civil diplomats.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before concluding, I would like to draw your attention to the special features of today’s program. We are now going to run a short video presentation on Japanese culture and nature of four seasons. After that, we celebrate this evening with a “barrel-opening ceremony”, or Kagami-biraki in Japanese.

The barrel-opening ceremony is a traditional way to celebrate a very important event by opening a barrel of Japanese national liquor, sake, which used to be meant to invite good luck before battles. But now, we do it even in peaceful evening like today.

Thank you again for joining us today. Please have a pleasant evening.

Danke schön und einen schönen Abend.