

2024 Emperor's Birthday Reception: Remarks by Ambassador Yamawaki (21 February 2024)

Your Excellency Dr. Constantinos Kombos, Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to extend a warm welcome to you, our friends of Japan. I would like to thank all of you for being here to celebrate the 64th birthday of His Majesty the Emperor.

It has been six years since the Japanese Embassy was established in Nicosia. Without a doubt, exchanges between Japan and Cyprus have intensified since then.

On the diplomatic front, after the new Cypriot government took office last year, the foreign ministers of the two countries met in May. In January this year, the Deputy Minister of Shipping visited Japan and attended the naming ceremony of two new ships built by a Japanese shipyard. I understand that a business mission will be dispatched to Tokyo in April this year to explore potential business synergies and opportunities. I also expect to deepen exchanges on the economic and business front.

Last year saw the start of exchanges between our two countries in the field of science and technology. Last October, the Director General of the Cyprus Research and Innovation Foundation visited Kyoto to participate in the "Science and Technology in Society" forum. This was followed by a visit to Cyprus by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, together with research organisations in Japan. Exchanges in the field of research and innovation are ongoing and we hope to see these flourish.

We also want to promote people-to-people exchanges, which will form the basis of our future cooperation.

Last autumn, for the first time, an exchange programme was launched for Cypriot high school students to visit Japan. The annual exchange of Cypriot graduates to Japan will also continue.

At this point, I would like to point out that, in collaboration with Kambos Village, we opened the Cherry Blossom Park two years ago. Last year we added more saplings and in total 45 cherry trees have grown. Although they were still thin and small, they produced beautiful cherry blossoms last April. I hope they will continue to delight us with their blossoms for many years to come and become a symbol of cooperation between Japan and Cyprus.

In the past year, the Japanese Embassy has organised kinds of traditional cultural events. In addition, the annual Japanese Film Festival was held with success in Nicosia and Limassol last autumn and the Larnaca Biennale showcased contemporary Japanese artists from Tokyo and Cyprus.

It is heart-warming how many Cypriots are also familiar with Japanese culture. The flower arrangements in today's venue are decorated by the Cyprus Philanthes and Ikebana Club. Cypriots enjoy haiku, the world's shortest form of Japanese poetry. Excellent works of haiku in Greek are awarded prizes every year. Together with Cypriots who love Japan, I would like to contribute to the deepening of the cultural bonds between us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During these uncertain times, I commend the diplomatic efforts of the Republic of Cyprus to contribute to peace and stability in the region. Since October last year, in response to the conflict in the Gaza region, the Government of Cyprus has promoted a maritime humanitarian corridor, which is valuable in improving the situation in the region. The coordination center in Larnaca for evacuations from the region to third countries has also been an effective system for us and Japan appreciate the contributions of Cyprus in this regard.

Last but not least, regarding the Cyprus issue, I would like to stress that Japan has consistently supported a solution based on the principle of a bizonal, bicomunal federation with political equality in accordance with UN resolutions, and will contribute this year as a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

Dear guests and friends,

Today we have prepared Japanese food, sushi and tempura, which is a precious part of Japanese culture. We have also brought new Japanese sake from Japan, which goes very well with Japanese cuisine.

Thank you again all for coming today and I hope you will enjoy this moment for celebrating the birthday of our Emperor.