

Lord Mayor of Dublin Alison Gilliland

Minister of State Peter Burke TD

Mr Hugo O'Donnell, Chair of the Experience Japan Executive Committee

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here today and I would like to offer my congratulations on the return of "Experience Japan" to Farmleigh after a 3 year gap. This is the biggest and most well-known Japanese cultural event in Ireland. I am happy to attend this event for the first time in my 2 year and 7 month service as Ambassador of Japan to Ireland.

The beginning of April is one of the best seasons in Japan, with full of cherry blossoms. It is also the time when the new academic and business year makes a fresh start. As a traditional Japanese custom, we enjoy "Hanami" or flower viewing, and get together in the park to admire cherry blossoms in full bloom and strengthen the bonds with our colleagues and friends. It is a great pleasure for me to take part in this "Hanami" event along with many Irish people here today.

It has been a truly difficult time with COVID-19 for the last 2 years. But I am delighted that Japan and Ireland have deepened our relationship during this challenging time. One excellent example is our close cooperation for the procurement of ventilators in the early stage of COVID-19. Another example is the Olympic and Paralympic Games held in Tokyo last summer. These events attracted Irish people's attention to Japan and strengthened our ties even further. Two Irish gold medalists, Ms Kellie Harrington and Ms Ellen Keane, were selected

as the grand marshals for this year's St Patrick's Day Parade in Dublin. This made me realise once again the meaning and importance of holding the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Following COVID-19, it is with deep sorrow that the world is now facing another serious challenge. Japan, as a country which attaches importance to the rule based international order, like Ireland, is profoundly concerned by the breach of international law and human sufferings. Japan stands with Ukraine. I very much wish for the aggression and human sufferings to be ended as early as possible.

Although Japan and Ireland are separated by a distance of 10,000km, our two countries share many things in common. I stand ready to promote further cultural exchanges and people-to-people exchanges. "Experience Japan" is a great opportunity to enhance mutual understanding through the presentation of traditional performing arts, budo, Japanese cuisine, pop culture and so on. I am sure you will definitely find out something to suit your taste here today.

I would like to sincerely thank Dublin City Council and the Office of Public Works for offering this prestigious venue and supporting all the arrangements for today. I would also like to express my appreciation to all the volunteers involved for your commitment and hard work. I thank Hugo and other members of the Experience Japan Executive Committee for their dedicated work. I also pay tribute to all the performers for their active participation. I will try to visit as many performances and exhibitions as possible. I hope you will enjoy the rest of the day, in accordance with the safety regulations.