

A dhaoine uaisle, dia dhaoibh go léir. Junji Shimada is ainm dom. I have been appointed as Ambassador of Japan to Ireland. Having said so however, I am afraid to confess that I am still “Ambassador-Designate”. I would like to extend my best wishes for the New Year to you all and say a few words of greeting on my arrival in Ireland and to celebrate His Majesty’s 65th birthday.

Let me first explain to you about the previous posts I have held. I have served overseas in Washington DC in the United States, Beijing in China, Jakarta in Indonesia, and most recently, Melbourne in Australia. Ireland is an entirely new country for me, however, I intend to make full use of all my accumulated experience. I particularly would like to emphasise that Japan and the EU have signed the “Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement” in 2018, and with Ireland, as an EU Member, I would like to, and I am determined to, escalate the Japan-Ireland relationship to that of Partnership level.

During my tenure as Consul-General in Melbourne, I spoke to many different people and many of them were from the Irish overseas diaspora. I was particularly impressed that many of the Irish diaspora in Melbourne know the background and actual year of their family’s emigration, and such information is clearly inherited from the previous generation to the next even today. I arrived in Dublin with the experience of having met them, and felt very emotional to actually come to their home country.

In today’s turbulent and uncertain world, the importance of strengthening and intensifying the business and economic relationship between Japan and Ireland is increasing. In order to strengthen our economic relationship, it is necessary to further vitalise people-to-people exchanges. The Joint Statement between Japan and Ireland, which was signed back in 2022, clearly calls for the revitalisation of people-to-people exchanges. With the view to make progress based upon the Joint Statement, I sincerely would like to make more efforts to promote Japanese language education and spread Japanese culture. To that end, direct flights connecting Japan and Ireland are a key objective.

If we look at the year 2025, there are various events linked to the relationship between Japan and Ireland planned and I sincerely hope that 2025 will be a productive year that will help to mutually raise the profile of Ireland and Japan in both countries.

For example, Ireland House, which will serve as the Embassy of Ireland in Japan as well as an information and communication hub, will open in Tokyo this spring. In Osaka, Ireland will have its own pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan, which starts in April. Concerning the Ireland pavilion at Expo 2025, I would like to express sincere gratitude for the statement made by the then-Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, upon completion of the Pavilion, marking

Ireland as the first international participant country to celebrate the completion of their pavilion's construction. Before coming here, I visited both buildings at the end of last year, and was deeply impressed by how these wonderful buildings symbolise the blend of Japan and Ireland so perfectly. In June, Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai will hold an Irish National Day and we expect there to be many visitors from Ireland.

When the Japan World Exposition Osaka was held back in 1970, I was only a primary school kid, and went with my whole family. It was on this occasion when I first interacted with people from other countries, marking the beginning of my life as professional diplomat. Fifty-five years have passed since then, and I am very pleased that Expo will once again be held in my home town of Osaka. I believe many of you here tonight will visit Japan to take part in the Osaka Kansai Expo. The Embassy of Japan in Ireland and I are determined to fully use the opportunity of this Expo to further strengthen the Japan-Ireland business relationship.

Apart from Expo, in the second half of the year, Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) will broadcast a new morning drama series called "Bake-Bake", telling the story of Koizumi Yakumo, or Lafcadio Hearn, known for his deep ties to Ireland, and his wife. I sincerely would like Ireland's national broadcaster to show "Bake-Bake" here, and I will strive to make all the efforts I can to obtain the understanding and cooperation from people in Ireland to do so.

This brings to the end my greetings to open the Emperor's Birthday Reception. My wife, Kaoru, and I have been posted to Ireland together, and we greatly appreciate your support. If you happen to see us around town, please feel free to say hello. I once again thank you for your attendance today.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh.

(End)