

## Greetings from the Ambassador of Japan in Portugal,

Mr. USHIO Shigeru

~ on the occasion of the National Day and His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday ~

February, 2021

I would like to extend my greetings to you on the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's 61st birthday celebration.

Last year, I welcomed everyone at the official residence for the first celebration reception of the Reiwa era, but unfortunately, due to the spread of the new coronavirus infection, it is not possible to meet in person this year.

First of all, I would like to express my deepest condolences to the victims of this pandemic all over the world, and extend my deepest sympathies to the infected, their families, and to those in anxiety... I would also like to express my deepest respect and gratitude to the Portuguese government for its efforts to prevent the spread of infection and to all the medical professionals such as doctors and nurses who are on the front lines of treatment every day.

Last year, Japan and Portugal celebrated the 160th anniversary of the Peace, Friendship and Trade Treaty between Japan and Portugal. Due to the influence of the pandemic, we have had to postpone various scheduled events, but even under such circumstances, bilateral relations have made strong progress.

In particular, the fact that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. MOTEGI Toshimitsu visited Portugal as Japan's Foreign Minister for the first time in 18 years in September last year is an important trajectory for bilateral relations. At the courtesy call, to His Excellency President, Dr. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and the meeting with H.E. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Augusto Santos Silva, Minister Motegi shared the view that they will further strengthen the bilateral relationship as well as economic relations, focusing on investments. The visit of Mr. ETO Seishiro, the president of the Japan-Portugal Parliamentary Friendship League and its members to Portugal in January last year marked a great opening of the anniversary year, and deepened the friendship at the parliamentary level.

On the economic front, since the Japan-EU EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement) entered into force in February, 2019. Portuguese products have become more familiar to Japanese consumers. The number of Japanese companies operating in Portugal is now about 100, and economic relations are steadily strengthening. In February last year,

before the spread of the new coronavirus infection, H.E. Secretary of State for Internationalization, Dr. Eurico Brilhante Dias visited Japan to further promote economic relations, focusing on meetings with Japanese companies, discussed even tighter bilateral economic relations in the future. After that, as face-to-face contact became difficult, the Portuguese-Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry held a webinar entitled "Why Portugal" in September last year to connect business people between Japan and Portugal. In October last year, H.E. Minister of Environment and Climate Action Mr. João Pedro Matos Fernandes attended at the "Online Special Event of Hydrogen Energy Ministerial Meeting" held in Japan, with a video message, thus a new form of connection has been established as never before.

In commemoration of the signing of the Peace, Friendship and Trade Treaty between Japan and Portugal in August of 1860, the momentum of the 160th anniversary was further enhanced by the issuance of a commemorative letter from H.E. former Prime Minister Mr. ABE Sinzo to H.E. Prime Minister Mr. António Costa and the Portuguese people, and by the reply from Portuguese Prime Minister in August, 2020. Due to the consequence of the pandemic, many commemorative face-to-face events scheduled for the 160th anniversary could not be held, however, last January, we held the Japan World Heritage Photo Exhibition, as co-sponsors with the Sintra Art Museum and the Japan Foundation. Carefully taking preventive measures to protect participants, we were able to hold the Japanese Film Festival at the Orient Museum and various other workshops on a face-to-face basis. In addition, we started to focus more on disseminating information related to Japanese culture through social networks, which has become one of the most useful tools in the context of the recent pandemic situation, and our Facebook page which was launched in 2019, has gained more than 1,200 followers. In the future, we would like to implement several safe face-to-face cultural projects watching closely the situation of infection, and at the same time continue to disseminate information about Japan through our online activities.

We would be delighted if you visit our video clip on this page, the special website for His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday Celebration, which contains various photos of activities the Embassy implemented throughout 2020.

In the first half of 2021, Portugal holds the EU Presidency. Promoting cooperation with Portugal is also essential from the perspective of Japan-EU cooperation. When Minister Motegi visited Portugal, he shared the same view, with H.E. Minister of Foreign Affairs Santos Silva and H.E. President Rebelo de Sousa, that Japan and Portugal, both being maritime trading nations, are important partners that share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law and together attach importance to maintaining

the free and open maritime order. Now that we are facing various difficulties and challenges caused by the spread of formidable viruses, we are required to unite countries that share such values. Japan and EU countries look forward to Portugal's leadership.

I renew my determination to serve as the Japanese Ambassador to Portugal at this unprecedented time, and I am determined to strengthen bilateral relations more than ever.

I would like to thank everyone who is watching this message. I sincerely hope that this year will be a year of hope and we will be able to live with peace in mind. I am also looking forward to seeing you again in person.

Finally, I would like to congratulate His Majesty the Emperor's on his 61st birthday and hope the relationship between Japan and Portugal will deepen further.

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