

**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, 2022

I would like to extend my greetings to you on the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's 62nd birthday celebration.

Last year, due to the spread of COVID-19, we did not hold the commemorative reception for His Majesty the Emperor's birthday in person, but celebrated it online. This year, as we are still fighting the pandemic, I must once again address you virtually.

First of all, I would like to extend my condolences to the victims of COVID-19 all over the world, and at the same time, express my deep respect and gratitude to the government of the Portuguese Republic, which has been working hard to prevent infections, and also to all the health care professionals who are on the front lines of the fight against COVID-19 on a daily basis.

I am convinced that despite the global expansion of the coronavirus and all the inherent restrictions, the bilateral relations between Japan and Portugal are moving forward steadily.

In 2021, the Olympic and Paralympic Games were held in Tokyo for the first time after the new coronavirus spread worldwide. We faced various constraints, but the Minister of Education of Portugal, Mr. Tiago Brandão Rodrigues, and Secretary of State for Youth and Sport of Portugal, Mr. João Paulo Rebelo, were able to participate in these Olympics enlivening the Games. I am very grateful for the unity and solidarity from Portugal and the rest of the world.

Because of the pandemic, high-level visits between the two countries were not possible, however in July last year, the Minister for the World Expo 2025, Mr. Inoue Shinji, visited Portugal and met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Augusto Santos Silva. In addition, we have held several Japan-related events here in Portugal, further continuing the exchange between our two countries. Further enhancing this bilateral exchange to maintain and deepen our friendly relationship is my important mission as the ambassador of Japan in Portugal.

Japan and Portugal have had a friendly and cooperative relationship for many years and are important partners who share fundamental values such as liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Furthermore, we are upholding the maintenance of maritime order as maritime countries.

In order to preserve the maritime order based on the rule of law, Japan promotes the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision and advances concrete initiatives while working closely with partner countries such as ASEAN, the United States, and EU countries, including Portugal. When Japan's then Foreign Minister Mr. Motegi Toshimitsu visited Portugal, Portugal's Foreign Minister Mr. Augusto Santos Silva expressed his support for further cooperation in this area. In September last year, the EU announced a "Joint Communication

on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" and a ministerial meeting on the Indo Pacific will be held on February 22nd.

Portugal will host the second UN Conference on Oceans from late June to early July. Hosting the international conference whose theme is "ocean" in a maritime country, Portugal, is significant. Japan intends to engage in concrete cooperation with Portugal, the EU and the world on this agenda.

Regarding cultural exchange between Japan and Portugal, we continued the promulgation of Japanese culture despite various COVID-19 restrictions. We held events such as online seminars to divulge Japanese culture and the continuity of the Scholarship programs for young Portuguese, besides our cooperation on maritime renewable energy. Also, under the strict health measures, we held, in person, a set-off party for Portuguese athletes going to the Olympics, a sake tasting session, and a conference focused on the historical Luso-Japanese relations. These events were praised by the participants. In addition, we are studying how to spread information about Japan using social media in a strategic way. As part of this strategy, we created a Facebook page two years ago and the number of followers is gradually increasing. We plan to continue and expand this initiative and, if you haven't already, I invite you follow us on Facebook and Youtube.

Next year, 2023, is a landmark year because 480 years have passed since the Portuguese arrived on the island of Tanegashima in 1543. In order to honor and celebrate this anniversary, we want to deepen bilateral exchanges in the cultural sphere.

I would like to thank everyone who is watching this video. The fight against the pandemic is likely to continue, but our embassy intends to gradually increase the opportunities to have face-to-face activities, and sincerely hope that we can meet in person soon.

Finally, I would like to congratulate His Majesty the Emperor's on his 62nd birthday and hope the relationship between Japan and Portugal will deepen further.