

Ambassador's Speech (The 65th Japanese Self-Defense Forces Day)

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you, especially Senior Lieutenant General Pham Ngoc Minh, Deputy Chief of the General Staff. In addition to celebrating the Self-Defense Forces Day, today's reception is also our chance to bid farewell to our military attaché, Col. Keitaro Shido, and to welcome his successor Col. Takashi Hara.

As Col. Shido will be talking about the defense cooperation later, I would like to touch upon Japan–Vietnam relations as a whole.

Under the “Extensive Strategic Partnership,” we are seeing the Japan–Vietnam relationship expand and deepen remarkably in many areas, including politics, security, economics, and culture. Japan recognizes that the sustainable development of Vietnam is vital to the stability and prosperity of the region, and Japan is working to strengthen this partnership.

It is my great fortune to work in Vietnam, a friend of Japan, at a time when Vietnam is brimming with energy for development. Allow me to highlight three reasons.

First, Japan and Vietnam share “various strategic interests,” such as freedom of navigation, respect for international law, CPTPP, and a free and open Indo-Pacific, to name a few.

Second, sustained high-level visits between Japan and Vietnam have continued to boost the mutual trust between our leaders.

Last year marked the 45th anniversary of Japan–Vietnam diplomatic relations, in which around 250 events were held over a year in both Japan and Vietnam. Last year, 20 ministers and vice ministers, 25 representatives of both houses of the Diet (from six parliamentary committees of inquiry) including the Budget Committee of the Lower House of the Diet, and 10 prefectural governors visited Vietnam. From Vietnam, President Tran Dai Quang, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, and 17 ministers visited Japan.

High-level visits are continuing to be made this year. Last week, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc participated in the G20 summit in Osaka and attended a summit meeting with Prime Minister Abe in Tokyo on the 1st of July, and the Vietnam Investment Conference was held with more than 1000 business leaders participating from both countries.

The third reason is that people-to-people exchanges at the grassroots level have also dramatically increased. For example, the number of Japanese nationals living in Vietnam has tripled (22,000 people) and the number of Vietnamese nationals living in Japan has increased nearly seven-fold (330,000 people) over the last seven years.

While Japan is suffering from low birthrates and an aging population accompanied by a serious labor shortage, many young Vietnamese are coming to Japan for study and work to fulfill their dreams.

On that note, I would like to conclude my speech. This reception has been made possible by the support of defense companies, such as Fujitsu, Mitsubishi Electronics, and IHI, and I hope you will enjoy visiting their exhibition booths.

Lastly, I would like to extend my best wishes to your health and to the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Asian Pacific region, and invite you to raise your glasses for a toast. KANPAI!