

Speech of Ambassador Yamada at Farewell Reception (April 23, 2024)

His Excellency Mr. Nguyen Minh Vu, Standing Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, Leaders of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the Government, and the provinces and cities, Representatives of the diplomatic corps in Vietnam, Representatives of the Japanese community in Vietnam, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express deep gratitude to those who attend my Farewell Reception tonight.

How time flies! Four years have already passed since I arrived at Hanoi as Japan's Ambassador to Vietnam in April 2020. Thanks to the support of many people, including all of you here, I am successfully completing my mission in Vietnam. I would like to thank you so much from the bottom of my heart.

To be honest, I now feel relieved to some extent as I will soon be discharged from the burden of diplomatically managing the Japan-Vietnam relationship, which is becoming increasingly significant, and is drawing attention not only from Japan and Vietnam but also from the region and the world.

Looking back to my four-year tenure, during the first half, I made a lot of efforts to tackle the COVID-19 issues. During the second half, I have dedicated myself to the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relationship between Japan and Vietnam. My duty here has been very fulfilling and satisfactory, as the relations between our two countries have reached an all-time high through our collaborative efforts for the past four years.

When I arrived at Vietnam in April 2020, the world was facing an unprecedented challenge as the COVID-19 pandemic was spreading all over the world, including Japan and Vietnam. In tackling with the extremely difficult situation, Japan and Vietnam worked together, shoulder to shoulder, to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.

When Japan was suffering from a medical mask shortage, Vietnam promptly extended helping hands and provided Japan with medical masks. I will not forget this kindness of the Vietnamese people forever.

On the other hand, Japan also provided Vietnam with over 7 million COVID-19 vaccine doses. I was never more conscious of the saying, "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the leaders' visits between Japan and Vietnam continued uninterrupted. In October 2020, Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide made an official visit to Vietnam on the first overseas trip after his inauguration. In November 2021, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh became the first top-level guest who visited Japan after Prime Minister Kishida Fumio's cabinet was formed. Afterwards, in April 2022, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio officially visited Vietnam.

A lot of careful and meticulous preparations were necessary for the leaders' visits during the COVID-19 pandemic, which were realized through in-depth discussions and exchanges of wisdom between the Japanese and Vietnamese officials even until late night. Once again, I would like to express my heartfelt respect and gratitude to all those involved in the preparation of leaders' visits from both Japan and Vietnam.

After overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic, the year of 2023 marked the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relationship between Japan and Vietnam, which became a historic milestone through the elevation of our bilateral relationship to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia and the World."

In 2023, there were a great number of top-level exchanges between Japan and Vietnam. In February, the online meeting between Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong marked a wonderful opening of the 50th anniversary. In May, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh attended the G7 Hiroshima Summit. In November, during the official visit by the Vietnamese President to Japan, the joint statement on elevation of our relations to "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" was issued. In December, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh visited Japan to attend the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation.

Also, many Japanese leaders visited Vietnam in 2023. In January, former Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide visited Vietnam. In May, the delegation of Japan-Vietnam Parliamentary Friendship League, led by Chairman, Nikai Toshihiro, was warmly welcomed by the Chairwoman of the Vietnam-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Association, Truong Thi Mai, and other Vietnamese leaders at their visit to Vietnam

In September, President of the House of Councillors of Japan, Otsuji Hidehisa, made an official visit to Vietnam. In the same month, Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino made an official visit to Vietnam, met with President and Vice President of Vietnam, and attended the ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment the Diplomatic Relations between Japan

and Vietnam in Hanoi. Afterwards, they visited Da Nang and Hoi An. Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino's visit made a significant contribution to the promotion of friendship and goodwill between Japan and Vietnam.

In addition to the high-level exchanges, more than 500 events were held at all levels and in all regions, including at the grassroots, the youth of the next generation and localities, in Japan and Vietnam to commemorate the 50th anniversary. This proves that the wide-ranging bonds of familiarity and sympathy exist between peoples in both countries, and represents that Japan-Vietnam relations have reached an all-time high.

I believe that the close relationship between Japan and Vietnam today has been fostered not only by their economic and political interests, but has also been built on a foundation of special "empathy and resonance" that has been generated through the long historical and cultural exchanges between our two countries.

Among the nations in Southeast Asia, Vietnam is the closest to Northeast Asia including Japan geographically, historically and culturally. Vietnam has a high degree of 'Northeast Asianness', that cannot be found in other Southeast Asian countries, such as Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, and vocabularies derived from the Chinese character.

It is also documented that there have been long historical exchanges between our two countries. One ancient anecdote is that in the 8th century, a Vietnamese Buddhist priest, Buttsu, visited Japan to attend the eye-opening ceremony of the Great Buddha statue at the Todai-ji Temple in Nara, and introduced to Japan a traditional Vietnamese court music, "Rinyu-gaku."

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Japan and Vietnam were deeply connected by transoceanic trade, called the "Red Seal Ship Trade." The love story between Princess Anio, a Princess of the Lord of Hoi An, and Araki Sotaro, a big merchant of Nagasaki, has been handed down from that period to the present day. Last year, the opera "Princess Anio" based on this story was performed in both Japan and Vietnam to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Japan-Vietnam diplomatic relations. Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino and Deputy Prime Minister Tran Luu Quang attended the premiere of the opera held in Hanoi in September.

I would like to conclude by saying that due to the rapid development of innovation on a global scale, the Japan-Vietnam relations are now advancing into a high quality partnership in new fields, such as DX and GX.

Over the past four years, I have been surprised by the excellent capabilities of the Vietnamese people in various situations. As an example, there are a number of the Vietnamese staff who are capable of highly qualified Japanese interpretation in my Embassy in Vietnam. I assume that there is probably no other Japanese Embassy in the world with such a large number of Japanese interpreters except for my Embassy.

I have also had a number of opportunities to give lectures on the Japan-Vietnam relations to many students at Vietnamese universities. Every time, I was impressed with Vietnamese students' intellectual curiosity, sharpness in their questions and high-level Japanese language skills.

Another great strength of Vietnam is a large number of people with strong backgrounds in science and mathematics. Last year, the 64th International Mathematical Olympiad was held in Japan with more than 100 countries around the world, and the Vietnamese team showed a great performance which was almost at same level as the Japanese team.

There are signs of advanced cooperation between Japan and Vietnam. As of the end of last year, the total number of Vietnamese living in Japan reached 570,000. Given the breakdown of this number, the percentage of highly-skilled human resources has been steadily increasing in recent years. In addition, the proportion of IT-related companies has also been visibly increasing among new Japanese companies which have launched their business in Vietnam, especially in Da Nang.

Furthermore, the New Japan-Vietnam Joint Initiative, launched last month, covers DX, GX and the development of high-quality human resources as its key topics.

Against these backgrounds, I believe that in the near future, high-quality human resources of both countries will become a key dynamo in promoting cooperation between our two countries, and will contribute to the development of industries with advanced technologies, including semiconductors and AI. In such a new era, I am confident that the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" between Japan and Vietnam will play an even more important role for peace and prosperity in Asia and the world.

Through my 41-year service as a diplomat, I have had many valuable experiences. The four years that I have spent here in Vietnam is a special period with full of activities and fulfillment.

In particular, the year of 2023, which marked the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Vietnam, was a historic milestone for Japan-Vietnam relations, when the

relationship was elevated to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership". It was also very special for me, as I was able to witness various historical moments and recognized the unlimited potential of the Japan-Vietnam relationship during the year.

I will soon complete my tenure as Ambassador of Japan to Vietnam. Whatever I do in the future, I will cherish the 'trust' and 'friendship' with everyone I have met in Vietnam, and I will do my best to develop the relationship between Japan and Vietnam further.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude once again for the support and cooperation I have received from all of you.

Thank you very much for the past four years.