

Speech by Ambassador of Japan to Malaysia

His Excellency TAKAHASHI Katsuhiko at National Day Reception on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

Good evening,

First of all, I would like to thank all of you for joining the celebration of the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, which we host face-to-face for the first time in three years.

This is my third time visiting Sabah since I came to Malaysia in November 2021. Every time I visit Sabah, I find a new charm of this wonderful state. Rich natural resources, unique cultures, harmonious society, friendly people, and fresh seafood. This time also gives me the chance to feel the Sabah's heartbeat to recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and realize the economic and social development under the slogan of "Sabah Maju Jaya".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Japan resumed visa-free travel for Malaysian last October and it is attracting more Malaysian tourists to visit Japan. Here in Kota Kinabalu, a good news about the resumption of direct flights between Kota Kinabalu and Narita since last December after 3 years suspension has greatly excited me. I hope people-to-people exchange between Sabah and Japan to be enhanced further, not only in tourism but also in study, research and business.

Also last year, we celebrated 40th anniversary of the Look East Policy, or LEP, and high-level visits were exchanged between the two countries. All those visits featured our achievement of past 40 years of LEP and new way forward. I would like to express my deepest appreciation on this occasion to many of you here for hosting and taking part in the 40th anniversary projects. Our embassy approved more than 180 projects as official commemorative events including several events held here in Sabah.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Human resources are the main factor for developing a country. When I talked to the leaders of Sabah, I was surprised that many of them have experienced training or scholarship program in Japan such as JICA program when they were

young, and I was happy to note that they still remember their experiences vividly with much appreciation toward Japan. It would be our utmost pleasure if our programs contributed for Sabah to achieve the current economic development. This year marks the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. Strengthening the Japan-ASEAN relationship will lead to promotion of a rules-based order in line with the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, or FOIP and contribute to the stability of the world. Last month I attended a ceremony at a port in Sabah for the workshop on maritime security. I want to emphasize that Sabah is in frontline in this regard.

I would like to conclude my remark by renewing my resolution to further deepen the friendship between our two countries, Japan and Malaysia. It can't be done without your support. I am looking forward to collaborating with you all throughout this year.

Thank you and terima kasih.