

The 12th Japan-Singapore Symposium Keynote Speech by Mr Iwao Horii,
Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan

Your Excellency Dr. Mohamad Maliki bin Osman, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Our chairmen, Your Excellency Ambassador Tommy Koh and Your Excellency Ambassador Yoshiji Nogami,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to have an opportunity to address the 12th Japan-Singapore Symposium as a keynote speaker.

It was agreed upon last year, when Japan and Singapore celebrated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of our diplomatic relations, to convene the Japan-Singapore Symposium every year. This year's symposium is the first of its kind since being upgraded to an annual event and would certainly set the fitting stage for marking the beginning of the next 50 years.

The Japan-Singapore Symposium, which was launched by our prime ministers in 1994 and was convened as the first gathering in the following year, has continued to play a pivotal role in the advancement of intellectual exchanges between Japan and Singapore. In the course of the previous symposia, participants discussed a wide range of regional issues and provided us with substantial insights.

I was briefed on the discussions that took place in yesterday's sessions in which the distinguished participants exchanged their views on how best we could further our bilateral relationship building upon the achievements in the past half century as well as taking into account various ongoing factors such as the security situation and regional economic frameworks.

I am looking forward to witnessing active discussions in today's public forum themed "Japan and ASEAN: Toward the Next 50 Years."

Now, I would like to talk a bit about our views on the regional situation, the current state of the Japan-Singapore relations and prospects for the future.

First and foremost, I would like to draw your attention to the

situation surrounding North Korea.

North Korea has been escalating its provocation by claiming that it may conduct a hydrogen bomb testing on the Pacific Ocean. We see North Korea as an unprecedented threat that is more grave and imminent to the security of the international community as a whole.

Of course, neither Japan nor any other people in the world want war. However, it has now become clear to us that dialogue for the sake of dialogue is futile. Our efforts of dialogue with North Korea in more than 20 years in the past only allowed them to buy time.

Reflecting on this harsh experience, we now have the view that it is important to make North Korea change the course of its policies by maximizing pressure on them by any means possible, which will in turn serve to achieve denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, a shared goal supported by the entire international community including China and Russia.

Now let me turn to the South China Sea.

The international community including Japan is concerned about the issue of the South China Sea, which directly pertains to peace and stability of the region. Japan has consistently championed the complete respect for the rule of law at sea.

In this regard, we are encouraged by the fact that Japan and Singapore share the common interest in ensuring a South China Sea that is the sea of peace and prosperity based on the principles of respect for freedom of navigation and overflight under international law. At the same time, we highly value ASEAN's diplomatic efforts, including those directed to the creation of the COC. Through these diplomatic endeavors, we should curb the ongoing militarization in the South China Sea and eventually achieve non-militarization. We hope that our two countries will continue to cooperate with each other in advancing maritime security based on our shared views on the matter.

Now I would like to talk about the current state of our bilateral relationship.

Back in 1966 when Japan and Singapore established our diplomatic relationship, Singapore was a new country that became independent just a year ago. You were facing with the challenges entailing nation-building.

Japan was also on its path to post-war reconstruction. At the same time, the international relations were deep in the Cold War.

Our bilateral relations started in tremendously different situations internally and globally from those of today. However, the relationship between our two countries has grown into a true partnership over the past half century that bonds us closely with each other through cooperation in various areas.

For instance, according to the 2016 data, there were 37 thousand Japanese nationals residing in Singapore and 800 thousand Japanese tourists visiting Singapore while 360 thousand Singaporeans traveled to Japan. These figures have been increasing exponentially in recent years. I believe this upward trend signifies that people-to-people exchanges based on the good political and economic relations gravitate our two countries toward each other.

The success of the high-level exchanges and cultural interaction to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations, or SJ50, last year was exemplary in appreciating our bond and showing our determination to make it even stronger.

In 2017, the first year toward the next 50 years, we are in a steady process of deepening friendship and cooperation between Japan and Singapore in dealing with various challenges the international community is faced with through our dialogues such as the summit meeting held on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in July.

I sincerely hope that we would build on this existing friendly relationship to enhance our cooperation with Singapore by sharing fundamental principles with you and learning from Singapore's intellectual diversity and insights. By doing so, I believe, we can deal with not only regional issues but also all the challenges humanity has to take on.

In dealing with the regional challenges, we would like to seek stronger cooperation with Singapore, who is ASEAN's coordinating country for China and ASEAN chair for 2018, so we could contribute jointly to peace, security and prosperity of the region.

We would also like to step up cooperation with Singapore in coping with global challenges, especially in our effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, agreed upon in September 2015. Our efforts include activities domestically and internationally to realize a society where

“no one is left behind,” especially those targeting younger generations and the Public Private Action for Partnership, or PPAP, to involve various actors including the private sector. We hope to strengthen our cooperation with Singapore in these areas as well.

I am filled with great pleasure to become part of Japan’s diplomatic team as parliamentary vice minister for foreign affairs and to have the privilege to visit Singapore this time at the onset of the next 50 years of the Japan-Singapore relationship. I am looking forward to opening the new pages of the history of our two countries with all of you here and all others who are like-minded in our endeavor to strengthening cooperation.

Thank you very much.