

**Speech by the Parliamentary Vice-Minister Kentaro Sonoura
at the first session of the Japan House Steering Committee**

Thank you very much for attending the first meeting of the Japan House Steering Committee. I greatly appreciate your enthusiasm and look forward to your active participation in the project.

As Parliamentary Vice-minister for Foreign Affairs in charge of this project, I have been closely involved in it from the start. I have been to all the cities featured in the project – Los Angeles, Sao Paulo and London – and am really glad to be in London again for this meeting with you all today. Holding the first meeting of the Steering Committee means that the Japan House project has finally started in earnest.

Japan House aims to expand the horizons of people friendly to and knowledgeable about Japan. It offers a comprehensive information service about Japan based on cooperation with both the public and private sectors, Japanese local authorities and British citizens and organisations. It will respond effectively to the needs of the local community.

In Tokyo, we have established a framework which aims to enhance inter-agency coordination at both political and official levels, and to gather opinions from the general producer and experts from the private sector.

The Steering Committee in each city supervises and guides the Japan House project. For the success of Japan House, it is imperative to organise events which reflect local interests, so we need your opinions and perceptions about what kind of events are likely to appeal to people in the UK. We will definitely report the outcome of today's discussion to the contractor and will try to have your ideas and comments reflected in the project. The Steering Committee is a crucial body for taking Japan House forward. Your cooperation is vital to make its smooth progress.