

Speech of H.E. Mr. Yoji MUTOH, State Minister for Foreign Affairs on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the 150th anniversary of Japan-Belgium friendship

It is a great honour for me to attend this opening ceremony of the 150th anniversary of Japan-Belgium Friendship, and to have the opportunity to give a speech.

On December 15 last year, an opening ceremony was held in Japan with the presence of Mr. Achten, and I had a honour to attend it as the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. I am very glad to be here in the ceremony in Brussels, and see again those who were present at the ceremony in Japan.

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude toward the Celebration Committee of the 150th anniversary and all those who have made huge efforts to realize this ceremony.

As you know, the honorary presidents of the 150th anniversary have been assumed by His Majesty the Emperor of Japan on the Japanese side, and by His Majesty the King of the Belgians on the Belgian side. I think this represents the close relationship between the Imperial family of Japan and the Royal family of Belgium, as well as our two countries.

Indeed, the exchanges of both countries are very active at all levels; between the governments at high level, Prime Minister Abe visited Belgium in May 2014, while Prime Minister Michel came to Japan in May 2015. These mutual visits, conducted within only one year, gave momentum to strengthen the bilateral relations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan is determined to celebrate the 150th anniversary on a large scale through many cultural events held in both countries and to develop the bilateral relationship.

Today, we have an honour to have presence of a former

President of European Council, Mr. Van Rompuy, as the Friendship Ambassador of the 150th anniversary, who loves “Haiku” or Japanese poem of seventeen syllables. And, Professor Vande Walle, a great Japanologist in Belgium, will deliver to us a lecture about the history of Japan-Belgium relations. In concluding, I hope that today’s ceremony will become a magnificent one where it is appropriate to celebrate the 150th anniversary of our relationship.