

“Japan and Ireland: A Partnership for Prosperity and Growth in a Globalised World”

H. E. Enda Kenny, Prime Minister of Ireland

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Ireland achieved its independence in 1922, and established diplomatic relations with Japan in 1957. Ours was an agriculture-centered economy at that time, but we now have a mature economic structure that includes exports of high value-added products and services. Despite the vigor demonstrated during the first decade of this century, the economy was facing the greatest danger since the country's founding when I assumed office as prime minister in 2011. The bursting of the bubble had caused a serious economic downturn and swollen the ranks of the unemployed. With outside assistance, we undertook to rebuild our economy and bolster our competitiveness. The worst is now behind us, and the Irish economy has recovered to a degree that permitted us to bring this outside assistance to an end in December. We would like to express our gratitude for the help we received from Japan and the rest of the international community. We hope to continue opening up our economy, enhancing our business environment, and stepping up our competitiveness.

Exchange between Japan and Ireland can be traced back 141 years ago to the visit of the four-member Iwakura Mission to Ireland. That era also saw people from Ireland traveling to Japan, among them figures renowned even today such as Koizumi Yakumo, who helped disseminate Japanese culture to the rest of the world, and John William Fenton, who composed Japan's national anthem "Kimigayo." Japan was the first country in Asia to establish diplomatic relations with Ireland, and we will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of these ties in 2017. Prime Minister Abe visited Dublin in June of last year, and I have now been able to pay a visit to Tokyo. I hope to see us deepen our exchange still further, pursue greater economic and technical cooperation and solidify Japan-Ireland relations all the more.

Ireland has enjoyed many benefits economically and systemically as a member of the EU. In June of this year, which marks the 40th anniversary of Ireland's accession to the EU, we were able to bring our chairmanship of the EU to a successful end. We were delighted with the decision made during our term to begin the historic Japan-EU EPA negotiations. As was confirmed at last month's regular Japan-EU summit discussions, a Japan-EU EPA would be a very important and beneficial agreement that should be concluded as soon as possible. Both Japan and Ireland are member countries of ASEM, and I would like to see us build cooperative relations in partnership with countries from the EU.

Ireland has actively contributed in the areas of peacebuilding and security. It has served as a member of the Security Council and the Commission on Human Rights at the United Nations, and it has supported the UN's peacekeeping operations for more than half a century. As a nation, we have gained a wealth of lessons and experience in UN peacekeeping operations, and acquired a great deal of expertise in the area of conflict resolution. Our commitment to a range of disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation efforts aligns well with that of Japan, and we have played a particularly active role in proposing UN resolutions and international treaties relating to the reduction of nuclear weapons and nuclear non-proliferation. Even when facing serious fiscal difficulties, Ireland has pursued development cooperation and implemented programs relating to development assistance. We have high expectations of future cooperation with Japan in this regard, too.

Significant development is anticipated in Asia, with this region expected to account for more than half of the world's population and production in the future. Ireland needs to expand its

political and economic ties to Asia and share in the fruits of its growth. Given the enormous number of global issues confronting us at present, we must construct cooperative ties not only with Asia but the rest of the world as well, tackling such issues as climate change, energy/food issues, and regional conflicts in collaboration with international organizations. Deepening bilateral relations between Ireland and Japan will enable us to combine our efforts and deal with these planet-wide issues. Japan and Ireland are separated by more than 10,000 kilometers, and our respective origins and cultures differ. Nevertheless, we must overcome such differences and work together as partners to strengthen our relationship in new ways.