

Opening Remarks by Chairman Shukuri
for U.S.-Japan International Exchange and Tourism Symposium
2023 on March 23, 2023

Good afternoon, everyone.

I am Masafumi SHUKURI, Chairman of the JTTRI, Japan Transport and Tourism Research Institute, and of the JITTI, Japan International Transport and Tourism Institute, USA.

First of all, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Honorable Koji TOMITA, Ambassador of Japan to the United States for his invaluable assistance in holding today's symposium.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to our distinguished speakers:

Former U.S. Ambassador to Japan, the Honorable J. Thomas SCHIEFFER,

Former President of the National Graduate Institute for

Policy Studies and current Chancellor of Prefectural University of Kumamoto, Professor Takashi SHIRAIISHI, Director of the Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Professor Kent E. CALDER, and, President of the JNTO, Japan National Tourism Organization, Mr. Satoshi SEINO.

In addition, I would like to thank all of our distinguished panelists:

Due to unforeseeable circumstances, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Mr. Mark KEAM is unable to participate in today's event. In his place, we have Mr. Curt COTTLE from the National Travel and Tourism Office, Department of Commerce. Then,

Minister of the Embassy of Japan to the U.S., Mr. Koichi AI, and

Executive Director of the Japan Center for International Exchange, USA, Ms. Kazuyo KATO.

Furthermore, I am very grateful for all of the audience that took time out of your busy schedules to attend this symposium in person and on-line.

In the U.S., cherry blossoms are a symbol of the friendly relationship between the U.S. and Japan.

It is my sincere pleasure to host a symposium on exchange and tourism between the U.S. and Japan once again here in Washington D.C., as an official event of the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival, particularly at this time of year, when the cherry blossoms are in full bloom. I would like to thank Ms. Diana MAYHEW, President of the National Cherry Blossoms Festival for her exceptional support for today's event.

Four years ago, in March 2019, our Institute hosted the "2019 International Exchange and Tourism Seminar" in Washington, D.C.

At that time, we invited two keynote speakers.

Former U.S. Secretary of Transportation, the Honorable Norman MINETA, is one of the two, but it is regrettable that Mr. MINETA passed away last May.

The other speaker, President of the JNTO, Mr. Satoshi SEINO, is participating here today.

In those days in 2019, many of us believed that the people-to-people exchanges between the two countries would continue to expand with the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics to be held the following year.

However, these people-to-people exchanges between the two countries, which should have been promised, have been severely affected in unprecedented ways due to the COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in early 2020.

Even today, the U.S. and Japan have not completely been able to escape the serious impact.

Also, during this period, Russia carried out military invasions of Ukraine in February last year and China's hegemonic movements have become even stronger.

Amid these violent upheavals in the international order, it has become extremely important, not only for the two countries, but also for global stability, to evolve and develop the U.S.-Japan relationship as an unshakable axis.

Last December, we held the first JTTRI Global Seminar, entitled "A Rapidly Changing Post Pandemic World Order and the New Japan-U.S. Relationship Hereafter," online, inviting the Honorable Richard L. ARMITAGE, former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, and Mr. Shotaro YACHI, former Secretary General of the National Security Secretariat of Japan.

They are prominent experts on the diplomacy and the national security for the two countries.

In the seminar, the speakers discussed the importance of evolving and developing the U.S.-Japan relations to a higher level and what kinds of efforts are necessary to achieve this goal.

In order for the U.S.-Japan relationship to evolve and develop in the future, I believe it will be extremely important to strengthen the people-to-people exchanges between the two

countries, including student and researcher exchange programs and business exchanges including corporate partnerships.

Needless to say, I believe that the exchange through travel and tourism will also play an increasingly important role in the years ahead.

These multi-layered and extensive people-to-people exchanges between the two countries will not only enrich human networks between the two peoples, but also enhance the mutual understanding of each other's society and culture and strengthen mutual trust.

Thus, they function as a “shortcut” to shifting the relationship from "distant and weak" to "close and strong."

Consequently, this will lead to the reinforcement of the national security system between our two countries.

Today, I would like to explore, with you all, the way we should address future challenges to rebuild and strengthen the

multilayered and extensive people-to-people exchanges between the two countries to a higher level, toward developing and strengthening the U.S. -Japan relationship.

Finally, I would like to close my remarks by wishing for further expansion of exchange and tourism, and for the strengthening of the ties between the U.S. and Japan.

Thank you very much for joining us today.