

January 4, 2018
Ambassador Hiroshi Inomata

Dear everyone,

Happy New Year!

On the occasion of us welcoming the New Year, I would like to look back on last year, and express my aspirations for 2018.

In March 2017, the Dutch General elections were held in the Netherlands. Even though the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) headed by Prime Minister Rutte lost parliamentary seats, they did get a good lead on the other parties and maintained their position as leading party. Afterwards, negotiations about the formation of a coalition happened over the course of nearly seven months. On 26 October, the Third Rutte Cabinet with Rutte as its Prime Minister was formed through a coalition of four parties: the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), the Democrats 66 (D66), and the Christian Union (CU). In terms of foreign diplomacy, the Netherlands will this year serve as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the duration of a year. I intend to closely observe how they will deal with the various issues occurring in the global community.

Compared to other countries in Europe, the Dutch economy is growing steadily. In the Budget Memorandum that the Dutch government presented, which includes the economic growth rate, fiscal surplus, government debt, and unemployment rate of 2017, it is expected that the Dutch economy will continue to grow.

In terms of the Japanese-Dutch investment situation, the balance of investments from Japan to the Netherlands is the second biggest within the European Union. At the same time, the investments from the Netherlands to Japan are the second biggest within Europe as well.

The number of Japanese-owned businesses operating in the Netherlands has increased year by year since its starting point of 374 companies in 2013.

Last year, a great number of delegations from Japan visited the Netherlands, such as Mr. Taniyai, the State Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. Through this, I once again felt the great interest that Japanese people have in the advanced horticulture establishments in the Netherlands.

In order to strengthen the relationship of Japan and the Netherlands in the field of agriculture, the "The Dialogue on Agricultural Cooperation between Japan and the Netherlands" was established in 2016 and based on that, a subcommittee came together three times and in November 2017 the first main assembly was held in Japan. In such ways, the cooperative relationship between the two parties has become stronger than ever.

From now on as well, I expect further growth in the agricultural field of both our countries, through the exchange of expertise and knowledge, as well as the progression of innovation occurring in the agricultural field.

In terms of the relations between Japan and Europe, since the first meeting of the 'Government Task-force regarding the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union' set up in July 2016 within the Japanese government, six meetings have been held (up until December). I know there is great interest among Japanese-owned companies regarding Brexit. Moreover, in December 2017, negotiations of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) were settled. I am convinced that from now on, once the process of the signing and ratification of this agreement has been followed

and the agreement comes into effect, it will bring about an economic growth that will be encompassing and sustainable for both Japan and the EU.

As far as the Japanese-Dutch bilateral relationship is concerned, in November 2017 Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien visited Japan to attend the memorial ceremony for the completion of the Main Gate Bridge of Dejima in Nagasaki. The ceremony was also attended by Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino and this served the relationship of the Imperial and Royal Houses of both Japan and the Netherlands very well.

On this occasion, Nagasaki and Leiden became linked as Sister Cities. Moreover, in the same month, the World Congress of the Junior Chamber International (JCI) was hosted in Amsterdam and from Japan, Her Imperial Highness, Princess Tomohito of Mikasa attended.

In 2017 as well, our Embassy hosted various cultural events in corporation with related organization. In Amstelveen I visited two festivals: Cherry Blossom Festival in spring and Japan Festival in autumn. In June, I also attended Japan Market in Leiden. In March, the 30th Japanese Public Speaking Contest was held as well, in which many of Dutch participated.

In June, Mr. Yukio Okamoto, former Special Advisor to the Prime Minister of Japan, visited the Netherlands and gave a lecture about the shape of modern Japan from the political and economic angle, which was a great opportunity for Dutch people to deepen their understanding.

At our Cultural Centre, we hosted workshops of calligraphy, Aikido and a lecture by Mr. Sebastian Masuda, Japan's Cultural Envoy 2017/18. I hope that in 2018 as well, through various cultural events, exchange between Japan and the Netherlands will continue to take place.

Concerning the Conferment of Decorations on Foreign Nationals in 2017, Mr Jacob van der Goot, the former Honorary Consul-General of Japan in Rotterdam, and Mr. Hein Odinot, former president of the Nederlandse Kendo Renmei (Dutch Kendo Federation) received in Spring, as well as Dr. J.A. Stam, Professor Emeritus of Erasmus University Rotterdam and University of Twente and Mr. Cornelis Johannes Nolten, the former local staff member of the Embassy of Japan in the Netherlands received in Autumn.

Last year, we also welcomed two new Honorary Consul-Generals, Mr. Jos ter Avest in Amsterdam and Mr Willem Briët in Rotterdam. I am looking forward to their activities from now on and I hope that, together with the Embassy, they will be of great help to everyone.

For the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), 2017 was a turning point, as it marked the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). In 2018, we will focus on the next twenty years, and as Japan, I would like to contribute to the disarmament efforts and international initiative that aims to prohibit chemical weapons, with the goal of worldwide abolition of chemical weapons and their non-proliferation, through the thorough debates on the pending questions related to the Chemical Weapons Convention, as well as the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, which has grown into a major concern of the international community. In December 2017, elections took place for Judges for the International Criminal Court (ICC). Ms. Tomoko Akane, Ambassador for International Judicial Cooperation and Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Public Prosecutors Office of Japan was elected as Judge. Along with my heartfelt congratulations, I look forward to her activities from now on, steeped in a wealth of experience. Moreover, last year, Judge Ronny Abraham, President of International Court of Justice (ICJ), and Mr. Philippe Couvreur, Registrar of the ICJ, visited Japan upon the invitation of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the State Minister of Justice, Mr. Masahito Moriyama, paid a visit to the Netherlands. It was an active year with many visits and I hope for the same vigour for 2018 and wish to reinforce it even more.

On the other hand, large-scale terrorism has recently occurred in places all over the world, including various places in Europe, such as Spain, Germany, Belgium and France. In the Netherlands as well, there is the severe situation of having to be vigilant at all times.

For us as the Embassy of Japan, maintaining the safety of all Japanese residents here is our top priority. Last year, we tackled safety measures even more for the Japanese schools and Japanese supplementary school. From now on as well, I wish to deepen our cooperation with the Dutch authorities of Public Safety and to take proactive steps to the best of our abilities to maintain everyone's safety, while providing everyone with information on the situation of security and terrorism.

The island of Sint Maarten in the Caribbean, a constituent country of the Netherlands, was struck by Hurricane Irma in August 2017. We cooperated with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence to arrange emergency transport for the Japanese people who were left behind there. I would once again like to express my deepest sympathy for all the victims. For the future, I would like to construct a cooperative relationship with other countries as well as the Japanese-Dutch relationship to prepare for emergency situations.

Finally, I would like to end my New Year's greeting by wishing you all great happiness and prosperity.