



What an immense pleasure it is for us all to gather on the grounds of the venerable Washington State Capitol, celebrating the 50th anniversary of sister relations between Washington State and Hyogo Prefecture, the most deeply rooted sister-state bond on both sides. On this momentous occasion, as we rejoice in how far we have come and gaze ahead into the limitless future, I wish to express how honored I am to be Japan's representative in this region.

As we come together to further enhance this profound relationship in our increasingly connected and ever-changing world, I wish to take a moment and share a story of significance to the peoples of both Washington and Hyogo about cherry blossom trees, or sakura, a symbol of US-Japan friendship. 101 years ago, Japan gifted cherry trees to the United States. To this day, every spring the flowers of these trees attract over one million visitors to Potomac River in Washington, DC, the other Washington. Those baby sakura trees, originally grafted to stock taken from Itami City in Hyogo Prefecture, sailed across the Pacific Ocean to the Port of Seattle before traveling across the continent to be planted in the nation's capital. One could say that the root of the US-Japan friendship was sown and nurtured by the combined efforts of Washington State and Hyogo Prefecture over a century ago.

We have a long and accomplished history together, from close economic partnerships to our extensive sister school and exchange programs, and I would like to express our deep gratitude and admiration to all those who made this achievement possible. Today we are honoring and celebrating the successful completion of a half-century of strong ties while also setting the tone for the beginning of the next. As we all anticipate a brilliant future of innovative relations between Washington and Hyogo, I foresee all of us dedicating ourselves to the pursuit of enduring friendship, cooperation and mutual understanding.

I extend my best wishes to Governor Inslee, Governor Ido, the peoples of Washington and Hyogo, and everyone who honors us. Let's make the next 50 truly amazing!

August 19th, 2013

Consul General of Japan in Seattle

Masahiro Omura