

Opening Remarks by H.E. AIKAWA Kazutoshi
at Bon Appétit Japon 2024
11th March, 2024

Good evening. My colleague Ambassador Mikami and I welcome each one of you here at this Bon Appétit Japon 2024 event. My dear friends from the EU, the government of Belgium and HORECA, the Hotel, Restaurant, Catering sector, thank you so much for coming.

Today I am so excited to introduce a wide range of beautiful Japanese cuisine and Japanese food products, and I know I am standing between you and the delicious food, but please allow me to say a few words on what this event is about.

Today, March 11th, is a somber day of remembrance for Japan.

13 years ago, 2011, on this very day, the huge earthquake struck the eastern part of Japan, with big tsunami. It caused unprecedented devastations in the Tohoku/Fukushima region, with the ensuing severe nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

We have come a long way in our recovery and reconstruction efforts. The resilience of the people is just remarkable. Particularly in the areas surrounding Fukushima Daiichi plant, returning the safe and livable environment to the affected communities has been a top priority of the Japanese government. Those efforts include the ensuring the safety of food products in the region, through the rigorous scientific evidence-based monitoring and control system, in close collaboration with other countries, including EU.

Indeed, the recovery and reconstruction would not have been possible without the friendship and collaboration of our international partners. As was the case of the earthquake hitting the Noto Peninsula region on this year's New Year's Day, the people of Belgium and Europe showed strong support and solidarity in 2011. It meant a lot for us.

Last year year's EU's decision to lift the import restrictions on Japanese food products after the Fukushima nuclear accident, was, of course, science-based decision, but it was also seen as emblematic of such cooperation and partnership between Japan and the EU.

Now, I am fortunate and delighted that we can enjoy the beautiful Japanese cuisine, particularly from Tohoku/Fukushima region, together our friends of Belgium and Europe.

(Japan-EU relationship)

Japan and the EU are close and trusted partners based on the shared values and principles. Whether in economic, trade, cultural or political/ security areas, the ties between us are as stronger as ever, as has been shown in our unflinching support to Ukraine.

This year marks the 5th anniversary of Japan EU Economic Partnership Agreement -EPA-, which has served as a cornerstone of our strong trade and investment relations. Thanks to this agreement, the export of our Japanese agri-food products to the EU has expanded rapidly, registering a 69% increase over the last five years.

It is therefore fitting that we celebrate the anniversary of EPA today with Japanese food products and Japanese cuisine here in Brussels, the capital of Europe.

(Today's reception)

Today, our friends in the food import and hospitality/ restaurant industries, including the celebrity chefs are with us. They are here to showcase the beauty and delicacies of Japanese cuisine in their own food stands. My Chef Arima and ambassador Mikami's Chef Ishii, though they may not be celebrities, are among them.

As introduced in the opening video, today, the seafood delicacies using Hokkaido scallops, not only Sushi and Sashimi, but also the European/French style cuisine, will be served, together with wagyu beef, sake and more agriproducts from the Tohoku and other parts of Japan.

I encourage our friends here to talk to the restaurant chefs and importers of each stand to ask whatever questions you may have, to know more about the region and food they offer.

Networking is also important in the food and hospitality world. Please share your thoughts with your families and friends about your experiences today. These food products are available in Brussels and throughout the EU, and the restaurants whose chefs are here with us will be happy to welcome you and your friends.

In addition, we have the representatives from Japan Tourist Organization (JNTO) today. Please do not hesitate to ask question about what the travel to Japan can offer. They are more than happy to help you with.

I am also happy to have Japanese football players of the Belgium league with us. The Japanese football community has been a great partner of the reconstruction efforts of the great East Japan earthquake of 2011. After the earthquake, the large football training center in Fukushima- J village- had long been used for the operational, logistical hub for the reconstruction workers of Fukushima Daiichi. Reopening the football center in 2018 was a symbol for the resilience of the region.

While Brussels is the capital of Europe, Belgium is the country of gastronomy.

I feel special and privileged to host today's reception to introduce the new dimensions of Japanese food here in Belgium.

So let me conclude by saying

Je vous souhaite une soirée heureuse.

I wish you all a pleasant evening.

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