

Norway national day

Norway and Japan — sharing values and experiences

Arne Walther
AMBASSADOR OF NORWAY

Today is Norway's National Day. We are celebrating our constitution signed on May 17, 1814, and our independence with parades of happy children waving flags, cheering their local school bands, singing our national anthem and honoring our king. A true celebration of peace, joy and optimism for the future.

Our National Day also serves as an annual reminder to appreciate freedom, democracy and rule of law. Values that are dear to our hearts and minds and that we should not take for granted. Values that we share with Japan and that provide a solid basis for further deepening of relations between our nations and among our people.

When we celebrate Norway's National Day here in Japan, we take pride in the important values that Norway and Japan share, not least as like-minded partners in broader global efforts to meet the challenges of our day in sustainable economic development, climate change, global health, disarmament and conflict resolution.

Vibrant democracies

Norway and Japan are constitutional monarchies and vibrant democracies. In Norway, we are preparing for elections to our national parliament, the Storting, in September. In Japan, you had national elections to the Diet's House of Representatives last December and in July will have elections to the Diet's House of Councilors. In Norway as in Ja-

pan, our politicians and voters take elections seriously. Political parties are voted in and out of power in an orderly, democratic and transparent manner.

This year, Norway is celebrating a milestone in the development of our democratic state, the 100th anniversary of women being given equal right to vote as men. Here in Japan, we will commemorate this anniversary in Sendai with Tohoku University on May 30. We are combining our celebration with the university's own celebration of the 100th anniversary of admitting its and Japan's first female student. Gender equality is a prerequisite for inclusive democracy for all the people.

Prime minister's visit

The official visit to Japan by the Prime Minister of Norway Jens Stoltenberg in November last year lifted our bilateral relations and ambition to a still higher level. The prime minister was accompanied by Minister of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs Lisbeth Berg-Hansen and a large, top-level business delegation. His visit, along with the preceding visit to Japan last year of Minister of Trade and Industry Trond Giske, gave new, exciting impulse to our political, commercial and cultural cooperation. The prime minister reconfirmed Norway's desire to support recovery in Tohoku with our ongoing "Team Norway" focus on target areas such as fisheries and coastal development, seafood safety, emergency preparedness, renewable energy and environment technology.

And later this month, we will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the agreement between Norway and Japan on cooperation in science and technology. A high-



Celebration: Norwegian National Day includes a children's parade, peaking at the Royal Palace. ROYAL NORWEGIAN EMBASSY

powered delegation of university chancellors, heads of research institutions and other representatives of Norwegian academia and research, headed by our Deputy Minister of Education and Research Ragnhild Setsaas will visit Japan. With their many Japanese colleagues they will have a unique opportunity to recognize achievements of the past and chart an exciting cooperative course into the future.

When terror strikes

Terror struck both Japan and Norway at home in 2011. For Japan, the terror of a natural catastrophe, the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which took away almost 20,000 lives and caused great material damage as well as human suffering. For Norway, the terrorist act of a single human being, who set off a bomb at government offices and brutally gunned down innocent youth at a summer camp, killing 77 people in all. For both Japan and Norway, 2011 was a year of national sorrow. We will live with that sorrow for many years to come. It was a year of

"kizuna" (bonds) both within and between our two countries and peoples.

And earlier this year, terror struck both Norway and Japan again. This time not at home, but to our citizens abroad,

when armed terrorists attacked a remote production facility for natural gas in the far-away Sahara desert. The attack and rescue operation left many dead, among which were 10 Japanese and five Norwegians, who were working together to produce much needed energy.

In a letter to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister Stoltenberg expressed his heartfelt condolences on the killing of innocent civilians and expressed his desire for continued cooperation between Norway and Japan in our common fight against international terrorism. Terrorism is a threat to human security. We condemn it and are working closely with Japan in the international fight against it.

Global citizens

When we on our National Day celebrate freedom and democracy, youth and the future, appreci-



Wonderful spectacle: Atmospheric auroras are seen above the mountainous island of Kvaløya and Skulsfjord, Tromsø, in northern Norway. ROYAL NORWEGIAN EMBASSY

ate the benefits of a well-fare state and the joys of life, we are also mindful of those less fortunate and those who suffer. On this day, we also recognize the importance of helping those less fortunate and being responsible members of the wider family of nations with which we share a common future in a globalizing world.

Please visit www.norway.or.jp.

Congratulations

on

the Norwegian Constitution Day

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