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# Lithuania National Day

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## United through values-based partnership

Egidijus Meilunas  
AMBASSADOR OF LITHUANIA

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On the occasion of the 99th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Statehood of the Republic of Lithuania, I am honored to extend, on behalf of the Lithuanian people and government, our warmest regards to Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial family, as well as to the government and people of Japan. I also take this occasion to congratulate my compatriots living in Japan.

The history of our state began more than 1,000 years ago and, throughout that period, Lithuania faced various difficult times, including when it lost its freedom for several centuries. However, Feb. 16, 1918, was a turning point in the modern history of Lithuania, as our country became an in-



dependent state again. Diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Japan were established almost 100 years ago in 1922. Legendary Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara reinforced human ties between our nations by his selfless work in issuing Japanese transit visas to more than 6,000 Jewish refugees — saving their lives — while working in Lithuania in 1940. He is highly esteemed in Lithuania and having streets and beautiful sakura park named after him, as well as establishing the Sugihara House memorial museum in his honor cherish his memory.

Last year we marked the 25th anniversary of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Japan, when more than 50 cultural and other events in both countries were organized. We deepened our relations in many areas such as the economy, culture and people-to-people contacts, to name a few. Last year Japan became our key partner in the Asia-Pacific region in exports from Lithu-

ania, tourism and scientific cooperation areas, especially in the field of life sciences. Our scientists agreed to work closely on common challenges such as the aging society. Agreements between science funding agencies were signed and a program of joint science projects was launched. A Japanese science and business delegation was one of the key guests at the “Life Sciences Baltics” international forum in our capital city of Vilnius.

Last year we celebrated an event of a historic importance — the first-ever visit of a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force training squadron to the Lithuanian seaport Klaipeda. On this occasion, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius said: “The natural partnership between our countries is based on their love of freedom and respect for the common values of human rights, democracy and international law. The values unite Japan and Lithuania, which are distant only geographically.”

Common values encourage

people-to-people contacts, laying the background for cooperation between our two countries. We strengthened our ties by implementing programs for youth, student and academia exchanges, starting new projects in cooperation between Lithuania and Japanese cities and continuing our cooperation in sports. The latter is of huge importance, considering the forthcoming Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020.

Both Lithuania and Japan have witnessed a significant increase in numbers of Lithuanian tourists in Japan and Japanese visitors to Lithuania. Similar to Japan, Lithuania attracts tourists with its great interlacing of rich history, cultural heritage and beautiful nature. I cordially invite Japanese people to visit Lithuania and explore its beauty and charm.

On this special day, I also would like to express my sincere gratitude to all friends and supporters of Lithuania in Japan and wish the partnership between our countries continues to flourish.