

Belgium King's Day Special

Strong relations thrive across many sectors

ROXANE DE BILDERLING
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM



This year, we celebrate King's Day in a very particular context. The coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we all live, work, travel, or precisely don't, and, more essentially, the way we

interact with each other. I would like to take this opportunity to offer words of support to all those who have been affected person-

ally or economically by this situation.

In times like these, it is very heartwarming to see that Belgium and the European Union have been able to count on Japan as a strong partner. From the onset, Japan has been contributing to international efforts to fund the research and access to a vaccine and test potential new medicines.

The mutual trust and support rest on an existing solid base, as the excellent relations between Belgium and Japan are indeed vibrant in many sectors. The links of friendship between the imperial and royal families go back a long time, with frequent encounters and mutual visits. Only last year, Their Majesties King

Philippe and Queen Mathilde of the Belgians came to Japan to attend His Majesty Emperor Naruhito's historical enthronement. Additionally, we are very excited to announce that an economic mission presided by H.R.H. Princess Astrid is planned to come to Japan in 2022. This will present an opportunity for further business exchanges, investments and maybe new areas of cooperation.

In the economic sector, we are proud to count more than 220 Japanese companies that have invested in Belgium, with many of them active in the pharmaceutical and health sectors. More collaborations are being developed, including the fight

against the coronavirus and the future production of a reliable vaccine for all. Many Japanese companies have chosen Belgium as their place for innovation and research, in the top high-tech innovation hubs.

Belgium has invested in many promising sectors, including, but not limited to, offshore wind energy, solar energy, biomass and hydrogen. We are very encouraged by the announcement of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga that Japan is committed to reaching a zero-emission target in 2050. This offers many opportunities to work together in developing the best ways to achieve this target. Our embassy will organize a seminar on the investment potential



King Philippe, Queen Mathilde and their children
BELGIUM ROYAL PALACE / BAS BOGAERTS

that exists between Belgian and Japanese companies in this field.

The cooperation between our universities is also well established and growing. It was undoubtedly affected this year, but both sides are very eager to pursue the many exchanges that ensure a future generation of open-minded, bright and polyvalent thinkers.

Lastly, I remember writing last year

how excited we were about the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games. Even though the timing has changed, we are still looking forward to watching the games next year. Hopefully, they will be mark victory over this terrible pandemic.

In anticipation of better times, I will spare no effort to continue promoting the close friendship between Belgium and Japan and wish you all to stay safe.

Assistance shared in times of critical need

KIMIKAZU SUGAWARA
PRESIDENT, THE JAPAN-BELGIUM SOCIETY



On the occasion of King's Day, it is with great pleasure that I express my sincere congratulations.

Though the coronavirus has swept away almost all the physical exchanges between Belgium

and Japan this year, we, the members of The Japan-Belgium Society, have the time to think about Belgium more often than before. It is partly because the media has

reported the severe infection status of COVID-19 in Belgium, causing us much concern. This situation, however, reminds us of the important history of the two countries at difficult times.

During World War I, Belgium was heavily attacked by Germany. Feeling much sympathy for the Belgians, the Japanese people helped them financially and materially. After World War I, Japan made substantial donations of Japanese books to rebuild the Catholic University of Leuven library, which was destroyed in bombings. Support for this offering involved not only businesses, academia and ordinary citizens, but also the then-crown prince, who would later become Emperor Showa, who had visited the ruined library. Mirac-

ulously, the Japanese book collection survived World War II and has remained in very good condition to this day.

When the Great Kanto Earthquake hit Japan in 1923, Tokyo and other cities around the capital were devastated. This time, Belgium, still recovering from the war, took actions and sent significant donations to Japan to help us out from the disaster. When another tragedy, the Great East Japan Earthquake, occurred in 2011, many Belgians took part in charity events and helped people in the affected areas. Some such events are still held every year and send us ongoing hope and encouragement.

These inspiring stories of mutual help deeply touch our hearts and we realize that the same spirit is very much alive in



Scenic Durbuy, Belgium's smallest city
EMBASSY OF BELGIUM

our minds. In difficult times like today, Belgium and Japan will collaborate in many ways and contribute mutually and in the world to overcome the coronavirus. The Japan-Belgium Society would like to promote support in its own way by being a bridge, continuously encouraging friendship in both countries.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.

Congratulations on the Belgian King's Day

JBS

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Congratulations on the Belgian King's Day

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ON THE BELGIAN KING'S DAY

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