

Speech by His Excellency Mr Takehiro Kano  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO  
Japanese Evening - 24 June 2025

Leurs Altesses Royales le Prince et la Princesse Eudes d'Orleans,  
Mme Vera El Khoury Lacoeyllhe, Présidente du Conseil exécutif de l'UNESCO,  
M. Xing Qu, Directeur Général adjoint de l'UNESCO,  
M. Suzuki Hitoshi, Président de la Maison de la Culture du Japon à Paris,  
Excellences, Chers collègues,  
Mesdames et Messieurs,  
Bonsoir à toutes et à tous.

Je tiens d'abord à vous remercier chaleureusement pour votre présence ce soir à cette « Soirée japonaise ».

Comme nous l'avons vu dans la vidéo d'ouverture, l' « Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai » a été inaugurée le 13 avril dernier et accueille chaque jour des visiteurs du monde entier. Cet événement international offre une occasion unique de découvrir une grande diversité de cultures. Certains d'entre vous ont peut-être déjà eu l'occasion de la visiter. Si ce n'est pas le cas, je vous encourage vivement à ne pas manquer une telle opportunité. L'exposition se tient jusqu'au 13 octobre. Pour ma part, j'ai prévu de m'y rendre cet été lors de mon voyage au Japon, et j'espère avoir le plaisir de vous y croiser.

Tout à l'heure, vous avez pu apprécier la superbe prestation de M. Sawada Harugin. Initialement professeur et interprète de guitare classique, Harugin-san est aujourd'hui un maître dans l'art du Tsugaru Shamisen et du chant folklorique japonais. Titulaire du prestigieux titre de Natori, il se produit aujourd'hui dans le monde entier. Merci infiniment, Harugin-san.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

2025 and 2026 mark a milestone for Japan: the 75th anniversary of Japan joining UNESCO.

Japan submitted its application for membership of UNESCO on 15 December 1950, and was admitted on 21 June 1951, at the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference of UNESCO held at the historic building on Avenue Kléber in the 16<sup>th</sup> district of Paris, where the Headquarters of the Organization were located before moving to the Fontenoy Building in 1958.

You have just seen the short film highlighting this historic moment.

The admission occurred five years before Japan's accession to the United Nations in 1956. It was even before Japan regained full sovereignty under the Peace Treaty of San Francisco in September 1951.

Thus, Japan's accession to UNESCO represented the first step in its re-engagement in the international community in the postwar era.

In the statement delivered after the decision to admit Japan to UNESCO, which you saw in the film, the Head of the Japanese Delegation, Mr Maeda Tamon, said the following:

"On this auspicious occasion of Japan's admission to UNESCO, I wish to declare, in the name of my Government, their resolve to fulfil all obligations under the Constitution and to pledge their full and positive support and cooperation in order to further the activities and objectives of the Organization."

Indeed, over the past 75 years, Japan has been a steadfast supporter of UNESCO, not only through financial contributions, but also by sharing its expertise and dispatching dedicated personnel. We have done so because we have fully embraced and committed ourselves to the spirit of UNESCO enshrined in its Constitution which declares that "the defences of peace must be constructed in the minds of men and women."

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Japan's membership to UNESCO, and with a renewed pledge of support for the Organization, the Government of Japan has decided to nominate me as a candidate for the Presidency of the 43rd session of the General Conference.

At a time when the international landscape surrounding UNESCO is marked by growing uncertainty, I stand ready to assume this important responsibility, working in close cooperation with the next Director-General, the incoming Chair

of the Executive Board, and all Permanent Delegates of Member States, to advance the shared values and objectives of UNESCO.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Japan has consistently supported UNESCO across the full spectrum of its mandate and remains firmly committed to continuing its engagement in the years to come. Today, I would like to highlight several areas of particular importance to Japan.

Education is one such area in which UNESCO has played a leading role.

Japan highly values and supports UNESCO's efforts to ensure access to education in conflict-affected regions. Our support has remained steadfast in Ukraine, Gaza, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and beyond.

Japan has been promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) for over 25 years. ESD contributed significantly to the 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development.

Currently, over 100 countries have been developing “country initiatives” to promote ESD. As part of the implementation of the 2023 Recommendation, we will continue to work with partner countries and the Secretariat to support a new phase in the promotion of ESD.

In the field of science, UNESCO plays a central role in oceans and water, and a unique role in disaster prevention and emerging technologies.

As a maritime nation, Japan has attached importance to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC). At the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, the IOC contributed with its scientific expertise, raising awareness on the importance of a robust global ocean observation system.

The IOC Assembly begins tomorrow, and its current Chair, Professor Michida Yutaka is with us today. I would like to pay tribute to Professor Michida for his dedicated efforts over the past two years as IOC Chair, promoting the Decade of Ocean Science and the development of early warning and mitigation systems for tsunami and marine disasters. I hope that, with the support of the Member States, he will be able to serve another term.

Japan will continue to support Small Island Developing States through IOC, in programmes of building geohazard early warning systems and climate-resilient coastal ecosystems.

We have just commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP), which has played a vital role in bringing together scientific knowledge on water. Japan remains committed to supporting IHP in the management of water resources and response to water-related disasters.

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, an area where Japan has supported UNESCO's unique role. We welcome that the Emergency Fund backed by the Executive Board decision last year is now mobilized to support Myanmar and Argentina, which were recently hit by natural disasters.

Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Neurotechnology, are another area where UNESCO should play a unique role. Japan fully supports UNESCO's initiatives and is pleased to note the steady progress in capacity building for the implementation of the 2021 Recommendations on the Ethics of AI, particularly in Africa and SIDS.

Promoting arts and culture and protecting cultural heritage around the world is a mission that only UNESCO can fulfil.

Japan has benefited from the international cultural framework of UNESCO, with 26 World Heritage sites and 23 elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage. At the same time, Japan has contributed to international cooperation through UNESCO to ensure that more countries can benefit.

Japan has been committed to the protection of all forms of cultural heritage, particularly in conflict areas, including Angkor in Cambodia and Bamiyan in Afghanistan, and more recently in Ukraine. We have also supported UNESCO's initiatives to protect documentary heritage in the Sahel region, such as Timbuktu Manuscripts in Mali.

Ensuring better regional representation in the inscription of World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage is also a key issue in terms of enhancing the universality of the international framework.

Japan has contributed to capacity-building, particularly in Africa, to promote inscriptions. I am pleased to note that several programmes have led to successful inscriptions.

It is equally important to review and improve the existing international frameworks. The recent International Conference in Nairobi, focused on the concept of heritage “authenticity”, was groundbreaking as an African-led initiative. It echoes the dialogue initiated by Japan in the 1990s, which led to the adoption of the “Nara Document on Authenticity”. Japan will continue working with other countries to make the international frameworks on culture more inclusive.

Fostering freedom of expression is a fundamental responsibility of UNESCO.

As a concrete measure through UNESCO, Japan has provided material and financial support to improve the security of journalists in Ukraine. We have also supported the infrastructure and human capacity development of media in South Sudan, with the aim of expanding access to reliable information and ensuring that future elections in the country will be free and fair.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The preservation of UNESCO's own heritage must not be overlooked. The Organization houses its own heritage, including the Archives, an art collection, and the unique architecture of the main building in Fontenoy with its gardens.

In order to protect the common heritage of member states, Japan has supported the digitization of the UNESCO Archives. We greatly appreciate the initiative taken by President of the General Conference on this issue, including the event last year to raise awareness and commemorate the centenary anniversary of intellectual cooperation under UNESCO and its precursor, International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC).

It is our shared responsibility to preserve our common heritage of UNESCO, and Japan wishes to work with other member states in this endeavour.

For our part, we are currently working with the Secretariat on the restoration of the Japanese style Peace Garden in Fontenoy, designed by Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi. We are inviting professional gardeners from Japan to collaborate with their French counterparts to explore ways to make restoration and maintenance of the garden more cost-efficient and sustainable. A special event on this issue will be organized in September.

Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs,

Les années 2025 et 2026 marqueront également le 80<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de l'adoption de l'Acte constitutif de l'UNESCO et de la création de l'Organisation.

Dans un monde de plus en plus incertain, la mission de l'UNESCO, contribuer à la paix et à la sécurité en favorisant la collaboration entre les nations dans les domaines de l'éducation, de la science et de la culture, est plus essentielle que jamais.

Engageons-nous ensemble et réaffirmons notre soutien à l'Organisation, en particulier dans le contexte difficile que nous connaissons actuellement.

Après les interventions de nos invités d'honneur, je vous inviterai à vous rendre au 5<sup>e</sup> étage, où vous pourrez déguster des plats traditionnels japonais accompagnés d'une sélection de sakés : ces deux éléments sont reconnus comme faisant partie du patrimoine culturel immatériel de l'UNESCO.

Nous avons également le grand honneur de compter parmi nous aujourd'hui un maître de thé japonais, Monsieur Mori Soyu qui a eu la générosité de nous faire découvrir une cérémonie du thé. Cette tradition, telle qu'on la connaît aujourd'hui, s'est développée au 16<sup>ème</sup> siècle, pendant la période Sengoku (dite « période des États en guerre »), une époque marquée par les conflits entre les seigneurs de guerre samourais. Le thé est alors devenu très prisé dans ces cercles. À l'époque, la cérémonie du thé était un véritable art d'« élever les défenses de la paix dans l'esprit » des seigneurs de guerre samourais.

Monsieur Mori est lui-même un descendant d'une illustre lignée de seigneurs de guerre. Il s'est depuis longtemps investi dans les échanges culturels entre le Japon et la France, notamment en tant que Président de l'Association franco-japonaise pour la cérémonie du thé. Grâce à son engagement, nous avons aujourd'hui l'honneur d'accueillir Leurs Altesses Royales le Prince et la Princesse Eudes d'Orléans, ainsi que Monsieur Savin YEATMAN-EIFFEL, descendant de Monsieur Gustave Eiffel, connu pour la construction de la Dame de fer, et son épouse.

Je vous remercie de votre attention et vous souhaite une très belle soirée.