As a representative of one of the host organisations, it is a tremendous honour and pleasure for me to be able to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the programme with you here today, in the presence of Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako.

The JET Programme started in 1987. The aims of the programme were to bolster foreign language education in Japan, to improve mutual understanding between Japan and other countries, and to promote greater internationalisation in regional communities around the country.

It began as a grassroots exchange programme with 848 participants from four countries, and it has grown impressively in the years since then. This year, there are 4,952 participants from 40 countries. Over the past 30 years, the programme has grown to become one of the largest exchange programmes of its kind anywhere in the world. In total, approximately 65,000 people from 65 countries have taken part.

There have been a number of tragedies over the past 30 years of the programme. Five years ago, two participants from the United States lost their lives in the Great East Japan Earthquake. On that occasion, many JET participants and alumni from around the world showed their support for the affected disaster areas and for Japan as a whole by volunteering and contributing to charity relief funds.

We also had new JET participants who volunteered to be assigned to the disaster areas because they wanted to support and encourage Japan in its time of hardship.

In this way, JET Programme participants have formed strong ties with people in regions all over Japan, and performed a vital role in supporting the country.

After their time on the programme comes to an end, many continue to work as bridges between Japan and the rest of the world, putting their experiences to use in various fields in their own countries, from government
agencies to Japanese companies. Many former JET Programme participants continue to facilitate mutual understanding between Japan and other countries.

Many participants and other individuals involved in the programme cherish and take pride in it. Thanks to the hard work and generous support of all those involved, the programme has reached this important milestone in its history.

Over the years, the programme has received increasing recognition for its efforts, not only in Japan but also around the world.

This milestone marks the beginning of a new chapter and we strive to contribute to a better future for Japan and the rest of the world.

In closing, please allow me to express once again my deepest gratitude to all of you who have shown so much support for the programme over the years. I hope that you will give us your continued support in the years to come. Thank you very much.