

Dr.Jyotsna Suri, Immediate Past President-FICCI,
Mr.Suman Billa, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India
Dr.A.Didar Singh, Secretary General of FICCI,
Distinguished guests,
ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honor to be here today for the first “Indo-Japan Tourism Council” and “Indo-Japan Tourism Summit” in Delhi, India.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) for all of your efforts as a host country to make this event happen. Especially, this event could not be realized without Dr.Jyotsna Suri’s dedication and leadership. I would like to express my greatest respect for my friend, Dr.Suri’s tireless efforts to bring our discussions into reality.

I also want to thank the Japanese delegation: Japan Tourism Agency, Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA), All Nippon Travel Agents Association (ANTA), and other participants for coming all the way to Delhi to participate in these landmark events of “Indo-Japan Tourism Council” and “Indo-Japan Tourism Summit”.

Japan and India are greatly strengthening their relationship under the strong leadership of Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Abe. Both countries are now further expanding and deepening cooperation in the field of economic and investment as seen in automobile industry and High Speed Railway. In addition, our cooperation is widening to include political and security issues, social affairs, and education. The strategic importance of Japan and India relations is growing further.

However, we have to admit that travel and tourism between Japan and India is not as active as we would expect if we take into account the important relationship between the two countries. Japan welcomed about 100 thousand visitors from India in 2015, and about 40

thousand tourists among them. But 1.13 million Indians visited the United States during the same period. Therefore, I believe that there is a tremendous potential for expanding travel and tourism between Japan and India.

I arrived in India as Japanese Ambassador last November. Since then I have been surprised and concerned by the current situation in the travel and tourism relationship between Japan and India, and have focused my efforts on improving and further developing this relationship as one of the most important fields of my work in India. Although we saw some gradual improvement in the past few years, I would like to see the number of visitors to and from India grow at an exponential rate. And, within a few years, we may witness an increase that is several times more than the current number of visitors.

Japan is quite a unique country. Natural beauty, such as cherry blossoms in Spring and the changing colours of leaves in Autumn, combines with traditional and historical buildings to create breathtaking scenery. These coexist with ultra-modern elements like High Speed Railways, innovative architecture, and robotics.

In addition, Japan and India enjoy strong cultural ties since ancient times. Japanese people worship “Seven Deities of Good Luck” that have their origins in the ancient gods of Hinduism. Another interesting fact is “the Japanese Syllabary table” developed under the strong influence of Sanskrit language passed along with Buddhism. There are, in fact, many Indian restaurants in Japan. You can enjoy a variety of choices in hotels, restaurants, and shops from high-end to affordable ones. I want more and more Indian people to come over to Japan, and discover what my country has to offer.

India has a richly diverse history and culture, each region has a distinct character, and cities like Delhi or Mumbai captivate visitors with metropolitan charm. There are great historical sites registered as the World Heritage and marvelous nature, varying from Himalayan Range in the north to tropical beaches in the South. I would like to see a drastic increase in the number of visitors from Japan to India by exposing them to the charms of India. But, in order to

accommodate a larger number of visitors. I also expect India to develop tourism-related services and infrastructure in a timely manner.

With the framework of “Indo-Japan Tourism Council” and “Indo-Japan Tourism Summit” that are set up and organized for the first time in India today, I would like all the participants to pursue “action-oriented” outcomes to improve travel and tourism relationship between Japan and India in a visible way. This is a great opportunity for both governments and tourism industry to get together under one roof and to discuss the expansion of bilateral travel and tourism relations.

I firmly believe that the new networks that will be built among the participants today will create new opportunities.

Tourism is a growing service industry that contributes to creation of new employment. In Japan, there are many cases in which local cities and communities struggling with a decline in population were revitalized through tourism. I believe that tourism will contribute to the development of local economies and society, creating many employment opportunities in India as well.

I am extremely delighted to see so many people from both countries who have a strong influence in tourism policy and industry working together at the time of “Diwali” season celebration in India, which reminds me of New Year celebration in Japan. I hope that this meeting held at such an auspicious moment marks the beginning of a new era for travel and tourism relationship between Japan and India.

Thank you.