

Yukio Tada Remarks
Cherry Tree Dedication Ceremony
Great Falls Elementary School
April 30, 2015

Ohayo gozaimasu! Good morning and thank you for welcoming me back to Great Falls Elementary School to plant this beautiful cherry tree in honor of this week's visit from Mrs. Abe and Mrs. Obama. It was my great honor to meet the First Ladies of both the United States and Japan at my favorite school to which I have supported for the past 26 years.

Great Falls Elementary School holds a special place in the hearts of Prime Minister Abe and Mrs. Abe. This is actually Mrs. Abe's second visit here to Great Falls Elementary School. Her first visit was ten years ago to begin the Sister School relationship with Great Falls and a school in Japan, called Eisugakkan. Eisugakkan is an elementary school in a city called Fukuyama, which is in the southern part of Japan. Every year since then students from Great Falls have visited their school in Japan, and almost every year students from Japan have been able to visit your school. Mr. and Mrs. Abe have also greeted the students when they have visited Tokyo. We hope that this tradition continues for many years to come.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Abe, also visited Great Falls Elementary School. He dedicated this Yūjo No Niwa Garden when it was first planted in 2010. So when Mr. and Mrs. Abe had the opportunity to visit Washington DC this week, Mrs. Abe wanted to plant a cherry tree in honor of their visit. However, Mrs. Abe and Mrs. Obama were not able to do the actual tree planting on Tuesday. I had a chance to meet Mrs. Abe three times at different events after Tuesday morning. Every time she mentioned the visit to GFES was her highlight and most wonderful experience during her official visit to the US. And she personally said to me that she regrets not having a chance to do the tree planting and asked me to revisit and plant this tree on her behalf. She has had a special affection for Cherry trees and interest in tree planting, and I will mention why later. I am very honored to be here today, and thank you all for all of your nice preparations in such short notice.

Cherry trees, or as we call them in Japan, "Sakura", are very special to the Japanese, because they are so beautiful when they bloom at the beginning of spring. However their flowers only bloom for a short period of time. Every April, when the Sakura bloom, people across Japan hold special parties to celebrate their beauty and friendship with others. They sit beneath the trees, and enjoy their time with their family and friends.

Cherry trees are also a symbol of friendship between Japan and the United States. One hundred years ago, Japan gave a gift of cherry trees to the United States, and they were planted around the Tidal Basin in Washington DC. Every April, here in the United States, when the Sakura bloom, Washingtonians also come to celebrate their beauty. It is amazing to think that people in Japan and the United States are celebrating the Sakura with their friends and family at the same time on opposite sides of the world. There is a saying that "Beauty of flowers bind the world together" So, today, I am pleased to help you plant this Cherry Tree in honor of the continued friendship between Japan and the United States, especially as demonstrated by the visit this week by Mrs. Abe and Mrs. Obama. Yūjo No Niwa means "Friendship Garden", and Sakura is indeed at Yujo

No Ki, which means “Friendship Tree”, so when you look at this cherry tree – when it is in bloom or not – please think of the friendship between Japan and the United States, between your school and your sister school in Japan and this special week when Mrs. Abe and Mrs. Obama came to visit.

Now I would like to share one thing with you. At last part of the ceremony for Mrs. Obama and Mrs. Abe, there were three questions from the students and the first question was to Mrs. Abe was “what was her favorite plant?” According to the White House official website, her answer through the interpreter was like this:

(Mrs. Abe) My favorite plant is cherry blossom tree, and there are many cherry blossom trees in Washington, as well. And I have one big cherry blossom tree in front of my house, and whenever I have some worries and difficulties, I always talk to tree and crying. (Laughter.)

Well, I know Mrs. Abe is very thoughtful and kind person and I heard the answer in Japanese, so I knew her message behind “talk and crying.” She wanted to say that she always hugs the tree and tries to communicate with the tree. It might be an oriental wisdom but we believe that trees have a natural healing power. During the first moments of spring we believe that the natural energy is the strongest as new growth emerges. I anticipate that this Friendship Tree will serve as a beautiful symbol of goodwill between all of you and Mrs. Abe. I hope that as this tree grows that your friendship with Japan will as well.

Finally, I would like to say that next April when this Sakura blooms; I hope that you will think of your friends in Japan, including the Prime Minister Abe and Mrs. Abe and me, who will be thinking of you. Thank you, Arigatoo.