

Good morning everyone. My name is Shiori Osako and I am honored to speak here on behalf of the participants of the Japan-Russia Student Forum,

The diplomacy between Japan and Russia has become more and more cooperative in recent years. Prime Minister Abe and President Putin have made efforts to develop the relationship by holding even 27 talks ever. The Japan-Russia Youth Exchange Center, the organizer of this forum, was established in 1999. Since then it has provided Japanese students, Russian students and various youth programs leading opportunities through a board range of fields such as economics, politics, culture, education, sports or regions.

The year 2018 was especially so special for us, as it was celebrated as the “Japan year in Russia” and “Russia year in Japan.” Following the event implementation reports, the total mobilized people of “Japan year in Russia” was up to 1 million 600 thousand and more than 600 bridging events were conducted in Russian cities within this exchange year. Further, it was announced that “Japan-Russia year of regional exchanges year” will be held from 2020-2021 in order to continue to foster the exchange relationships. Taking into account that, the both countries promise to continue developing much deeper and friendly ties and we enjoy the benefits of progress in the Japan-Russia relationship.

Personally, 2018 was a very important year for me to learn more about Russia, which had a significant impact on who I am today. In other words, 2018 was “Russian year in my life.” In May, I went to Vladivostok to take part in Model United Nations Conference. Three students from Japan were scheduled to participate, but the two suddenly canceled due to circumstances. But I went to Russia by myself because I knew it will be a valuable experience. Initially I was very worried about going alone for the first time but soon found out that I didn't need to be. People were very helpful and welcoming.

In August, I went on a solo trip to Russia, visited Irkutsk, Novosibirsk, Moscow, Sochi, Krasnodar, Petersburg and another 10 cities in total by myself. I wanted to visit as many cities as I could in order to deepen my knowledge of this country with huge vast land and more than 120 ethnic groups. Just visiting a few cities never satisfied my passion for Russia so I decided to take a big adventure that changed my life. During the trip, I interacted with a lot of people. Their friendly attitude, their keen interests of Japan, or the historical proof such as buildings, pictures which connected both two countries have always touched my heart sincerely. By the end of the trip, my simple hope for being involved in the development of the Japan-Russian relationship has changed into my

strong aspiration to work for the development of future relationships through my life.

In December, I went back to Moscow and participated in International Volunteer Forum as an only one delegate from Japan. The forum was aimed to invite social activists and volunteers from all over the world and to provide several unique opportunities including different discussions, workshops and presentations. On the first day of the forum, I found out that I was only one from Japan, again, out of 5000 participants from more than 100 countries, but this time I had no worries about that and I rather made the most of this opportunity to showcase myself that I am very passionate about becoming a bridge between two countries.

Especially one of the core committee of this forum and Russian diplomats were very kind of me to care about during the conference. On the 3rd day, he told me that I was successfully selected as one of 10 Outstanding Foreign Delegates and I sat on the stage of closing ceremony together with the President Putin. The diplomat's unforgettable message given me after I came back to Japan "I recommended you as a good representative of Japan, as a person, who I believe will be working with us for developing cooperation between Russia and Japan" has boosted my confidence in what I have done since I started being interested in Russia and learning its language. Also, it has encouraged me to follow my goal and keep on challenging. Thus, I decided to take this chance participating in this student forum as my future career step.

This is my short story about how I was pushed to participate in this forum as a next step to pursue my goal. And I guess each one of you has also original story for coming here based on special history or experience. So I would like to propose to you my idea, that is to share your story, aspiration toward this forum as I introduced you so that we will gain new perspective, knowledge and inspiration for further accomplishments.

Allow me to conclude by wishing fruitful discussions in this forum will be one of the most memorable events for each and every one of you, and that this forum leads to the creation of the bright future for both Japan and Russia. Thank you very much.