

*Your Excellency Mr. Ambassador,
Madam Minister,
Ladies and Gentlemen*

On behalf of the Traditional Karate Federation of Poland, I would like to express my deepest thanks to all guests for honouring us with your presence today.

Traditional karate is the original Japanese karate, and as such it belongs to the Japanese family of martial arts called Budo. The main aim of Budo practice is self-improvement. It is this kind of practice and education based on the principles of Budo that have developed the distinctive self-discipline and strength of the Japanese society – the second greatest economic powerhouse of the world.

There are various forms of practice of Japanese martial arts, and one of them is competition based on the principle called Shi-ai. It involves testing one another, so we always start and finish our contests with a bow, a sign of respect. The aim of Shi-ai is not only to win over the opponent, but – above all – to test one's own technique and ability to react quickly and focus in the situation of extreme danger. We need these qualities in the complex and ever-changing world today. By testing each other, we also develop and experience unique Solidarity with others. It is true both for individuals and for entire nations, as it has been the case with Japan.

When this enormous tragedy happened in March last year, I was in Los Angeles. I watched the water level in the Pacific Ocean increase by as much as two metres immediately after the tsunami. On the next day, when I was already on my way to Poland, I did nothing but think that we should do something to show our solidarity with the country that is so important for us. This is how the idea of the project called “Solidarity Bridge – Polish Holiday for Japanese Children Nihon 2011” was born.

Last summer, we had a group of 30 children at the Japanese Martial Arts and Sports Centre “Dojo-Stara Wies”, who arrived from Iwate and Miyagi, two prefectures that were most affected by the tragedy. During the 17 days they spent here, in Poland, they could forget about the difficult situation in their country. We believe that the experience they gained here strengthened them and let them detach from painful memories at least for a moment. For us, it was also a special experience thanks to which we realised that every problem can be solved if there are good people with great hearts around you.

Among the guests today, there are people who helped us a lot with the project. I would like to thank you for that with all my heart – this is your award, too. I would also like to add that this idea has been based on very important values, for which my Parents and Teachers, who taught them to me – especially Sensei Hidetaka Nishiyama deserve special thanks. Most of all I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the Japanese side for this decoration which is a great honor for me and special commitment. Arigato gozaimashita! (transl. Thank you very much!)

It is our dream to see this project transform from a one-time event into a real Friendship Bridge. This year, we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of traditional karate in Poland, and we are hosting many prestigious events including international ones, which have their culmination with the 16th Traditional Karate ITKF World Championship (6-7 October, in Lodz), so we focus all our efforts on these. Next year, however, we are going to continue the Friendship Bridge project and invite 30 Japanese orphans for summer vacations, and send a group of Polish children with revisit to Japan. I am convinced we can do it together. Onegaishimasu! Thank you very much! Arigato gozaimashita!

*Włodzimierz Kwiecinski
Chairman
Traditional Karate Federation of Poland*