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**Opening Speech, Global Partnership Meeting
By Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and members of the BirdLife family

It was with great sadness that I watched the news of the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II last Thursday, and I join the people of the UK, and the Commonwealth, in mourning her passing.

It is indeed the end of an era and these last few days have given us the time to reflect, with respectful admiration, on the incredible number of roles that she fulfilled to such perfection.

We all have much to learn from Her Late Majesty's dedicated sense of service and the resilience she showed on so many occasions, and, in that spirit, it is surely now our duty to show our commitment to environmental conservation.

I have had the honour of serving as your Honorary President since 2004, and I consider myself incredibly fortunate to be the one in this position as we celebrate the centennial of the BirdLife partnership.

For an organisation that has never had the financial strength of the really big environmental NGOs, BirdLife can look back on its first century with a sense of deep destiny.

With unmatched scientific rigour and breadth it has set evidence-based conservation targets and agendas for all the world to aim for and follow.

(And I stress, "for the world" –they are not just for its own fine flock of 115 national partners.)

I have been immensely proud of the fact that BirdLife's scientific output on environment is more frequently cited than that of any university in Britain, and I am afraid that I have been known to be somewhat vocal when bringing this to the attention of people here in Japan when I talk about our work.

I am not a scientist—with only a biology A 'level to my name—and I was naïve enough to think that the lockdowns and minimum movement of people worldwide as a result of COVID19, and the resultant decrease in carbon emissions, would manifest itself more clearly in reducing climate change.

After all, governments and NGOs across the globe have emphasized the importance of using less fossil fuel and, for the first time, COVID19 had got us there.

You would reasonably imagine that these last two and a half years have probably left the faintest of carbon footprints in living memory. YET we have been seeing fierce forest fires, severe droughts, and concentrated downpours the world over, and each seems to be on an unprecedented scale. There has not been any obvious change to the climate crisis.

Have the messages put out by BirdLife and other organisations been clear enough?

I am obviously more cognisant of environmental issues, and yet I lived in hope that the lockdown days would make a difference.

I understand that climate change is the result of a steady build-up of carbon over two centuries of industrial development and deforestation and that that level of carbon cannot be reduced that easily.

I now understand that all that happened during the lockdown days was that we put less carbon than usual into the atmosphere, BUT that the carbon is still there, and that the effects of this old build-up of carbon is now suddenly becoming manifest with force.

And, with a certain sinking sense of horror, I realise that never again will we be able to achieve the sort of carbon emission reductions that we achieved during lockdown.

I find this seriously worrying, to say the least.

Conservationists can save forests, wetlands and all kinds of habitat, but if global heating continues because of our insatiable need for carbon-based energy then all the efforts of the conservationists will be completely undermined and wasted.

But I take comfort from the BirdLife partnership. The partnership is special in that each of its members has a resonating voice that can be raised in each country, and it can be used so that, more than preaching to the converted, we are also reaching out way beyond to raise awareness and ensure action.

We need more, many more, to join us on our mission.

The BirdLife partnership is unique in that we are the power of many. The power of many, if channeled so that we move in the same designated directions, is a force to be reckoned with, and I am confident that you will be able to decide on the paths down which we should proceed.

I am delighted to see the BirdLife family flocking together again, and, in closing, I quote from the speech that Her Majesty gave in launching the COP26 climate conference last year.

“Working side by side, we have the ability to solve the most insurmountable problems and to triumph over the greatest of adversities” .

I wish you all a constructive meeting that will, I hope, lead to concrete action.