

LETTERS FROM GLH COODINATOR

Spring

April 2026

In the words of the great Persian poet, Hafez from Shiraz:

ز کوی یار می آید نسیم نوروز
از این باد ار مدد خواهی، چراغ دل برافروزی

'The breeze of Nowruz wafting from a friend's abode; ask for its help, to light a candle in your heart'

Spring Equinox has arrived in the Northern Hemisphere. Usually falling around March 19–21, in the greater Middle East and other parts of Asia this celebration holds a special place among all other renewal feasts. *Nowruz* (New Day) in Persian, *Shunbun* 春分 in Japanese, it heralds the arrival of new life, light and warmth, marking the moment when the sun stands directly above the Equator and night and day are the exact length. Today, *Nowruz* is recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage and March 21 designated by the United Nations as International *Nowruz Day*, celebrated by some 300 million people across nations, faiths, and cultures.

In Japan this is also the season marking the new administrative year, when many staff are transferred to new sections and assignments. And so it is that our own Mariko Kikuchi completes her 2-year rotation with UNITAR and her time with GLH, to return to her home base at the Hiroshima Prefectural Government. It has been wonderful watching Mariko grow into her role as focal point of GLH secretariat, embracing her mission to connect applicants and partners to the seeds. She has mastered the process to excellence, and on the way made new friends across the planet. In a few months Mariko will take off for the University of Sydney to study development policy as an International Rotary scholar. She will of course also remain part of the GLH family, this time as a research associate. I wish to thank the Hiroshima Prefectural Government for its ongoing support to UNITAR with secondments of young, bright and accomplished staff, the Hiroshima Tonan Rotary and Rotary International for unstinting support to our team, and Mariko herself, for never giving up.

Of course this is also the famous cherry blossom season, a symbol of ethereal and eternal beauty. In Hiroshima we have the hibaku zakura trees (Somei-yoshino) that survived the atomic bombing at a distance of 1,050 meters from the hypocenter. They are now in a cluster at the west entrance of the rebuilt Hiroshima City Hall. In 2022 we hosted a scientific delegation of plant scientists headed by our partner and science advisor Dr. Ari Novy, then president of the San Diego Botanic Garden. I still marvel at how a few wounded trees can do so much to bring so many people and so many strands together in such a simple yet profound way.

Finally in these times of war and violence, my thoughts are with Iranians and others in the Middle East—be they Zoroastrian, Jewish, Buddhist, Armenian, Assyrian, Muslim, Baha'i, agnostic, or atheist—who long for peace and freedom. I wish for them the four freedoms, articulated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. To them and to all who celebrate *Nowruz* -- Afghans, Turks, Central Asians, Iraqis, Indians, Chinese, and the many communities of the ancient Silk Roads and the global diaspora—Happy New Year. May that the wisdom of this enduring tradition bring us a more free, just, and abundant world.

Nassrine Azimi, PhD
Co-Founder/Coordinator
Green Legacy Hiroshima (GLH) Initiative



Mariko at the Hiroshima Botanic Garden, with indispensable GLH partner Nakabara-san; Scientific delegation in Hiroshima 2022; Norwuz display at Azimi household

Somei-Yoshino Cherry Blossom

(*Cerasus × yedoensis* 'Somei-yoshino')

ソメイヨシノ

1,050 m from the hypocenter

Location: Hiroshima City Hall
1-6-34 Kokutaiji-machi, Naka-ku,
Hiroshima