

**Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs
No.3: Promoting Japan-US exchange**

25 February 2026



Japan-U.S. Exchange Program at American Village, Chatan Town
(31 January 2026, at a hotel in Chatan Town)

February brought continued cold days even in Okinawa. I hope this message finds you all in good health. Since assuming my post last November, I have nearly completed attending various year-end and New Year events and greeting a wide range of stakeholders. My daily life has finally begun to settle down.

Over the past three months on the job, what has brought me particular joy is seeing steady progress in Japan-U.S. exchange across many fields in Okinawa. I believe this is the result of years of dedicated efforts by people on both sides.

In this edition of the Newsletter of Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs, I would like to share with you some of the various Japan-U.S. exchange events and initiatives I have participated in since my arrival, and together, consider the future direction of U.S.-Japan exchange.



Kadena Special Olympics
(6 December 2025, at the U.S. Air Force Kadena Air Base)

● Kadena Special Olympics (KSO)

One of the most memorable events for me was the [Kadena Special Olympics \(KSO\)](#) held on 6 December last year at the U.S. Air Force Kadena Air Base. Fortunately, the weather was favorable that day. Many distinguished guests and stakeholders from both Japan and the United States attended, including Brigadier General and Commander of the 18th Wing of the U.S. Air Force John Gallimore, Colonel and Deputy Commander Robert Arnett, Okinawa Prefectural Governor Denny Tamaki with their spouses, as well as Kadena Town Mayor Toyama Hiroshi.

The Kadena Special Olympics is an event that provides children with physical and intellectual disabilities from Okinawa and the United States with an opportunity to shine through sports. This was the 21st event, with over 100 children with disabilities from both countries participating in various sports such as sprinting, basketball, and football. Please be sure to check out the [videos](#) and [photos](#).

Watching the children striving with great effort despite their disabilities, along with family members and supporters cheering them on together, made me feel that

the significance of such benevolent activities transcends national boundaries. The preparation and operation of this event are supported by many volunteers, including the [U.S. Air Force](#) and [Special Olympics Nippon Okinawa](#). I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude once again to the organizers, all those involved, and the volunteers.



Exchange between Japanese and American Elementary School Teachers
(29 January 2026, at Hagoromo Elementary School, Ginowan City)

● Exchange between Japanese and American Elementary School Teachers

An exchange program between Japanese and American elementary school teachers was held at Bob Hope Elementary School at Kadena Air Base on 29 October last year and at Hagoromo Elementary School in Ginowan City on 29 January this year, co-hosted by the [U.S. Department of War Education Activity \(DoWEA\)](#) and the [Ginowan City Board of Education](#).

I joined the exchange program at Hagoromo Elementary School which took place this year. Participating teachers toured the school and observed classes before joining lessons in the classroom, where students gave presentations in English

about Japanese and Okinawan culture. After the classes, the teachers exchanged views on teaching methods and student assessment in Japanese elementary schools, making for a valuable opportunity to learn from each other.

Okinawa is home to many elementary schools not only of Japan but also of the United States. I believe initiatives that create opportunities for both students and teachers from Japan and the U.S. to learn from each other's approaches and enhance educational quality are meaningful. Okinawa Liaison Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue supporting such initiatives.



Japan-U.S. Exchange Program at American Village, Chatan Town
(31 January 2026, at a hotel in Chatan Town)

● Japan-U.S. Exchange Program at American Village, Chatan Town

Exchange between Japanese and American children is also progressing through community-led initiatives. On 13 December last year and 31 January this year, an exchange program titled “Christmas Video Production” was held at American Village in Chatan Town, involving about 50 students from Chatan Town and middle schools on U.S. Forces’ facilities. This program began in 2023, and this

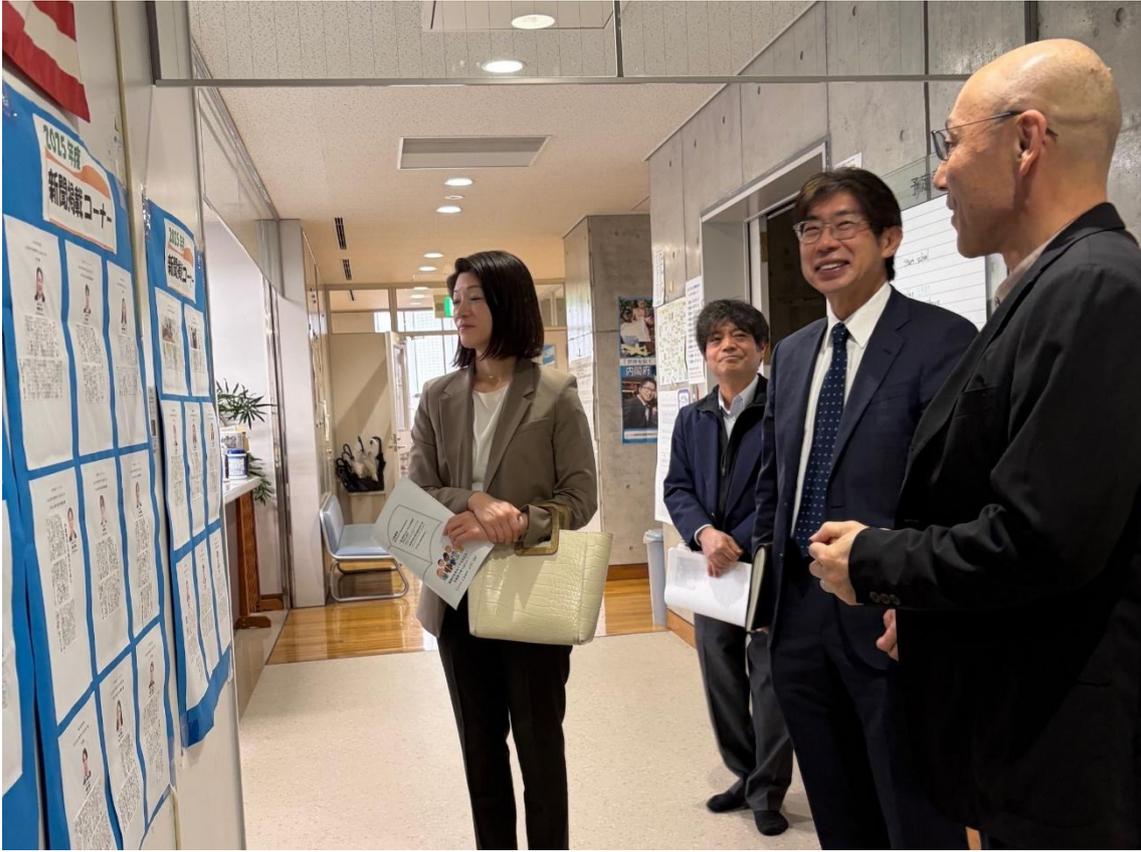
was its third edition.

Participants formed mixed teams of Japanese and American students and filmed and produced Christmas-themed videos set in American Village. From shooting to editing, all work was done collaboratively by the Japanese and American middle school students, providing a valuable opportunity to deepen their friendship.

I attended the presentation event on 31 January. Together with the Mayor of Chatan Town, the Chairperson of Chatan's Tourism Design Lab (Chatan DMO), and a representative from the U.S. Department of War Education Activity (DoWEA), I watched and judged all the teams' works and presented awards to the most outstanding teams.

I believe American Village in Chatan Town offers an excellent stage for children from both Japan and the U.S. to learn about each other's cultures. I look forward to its continued growth and success.

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Visit to Kadena Language Institute (KLI) (2 February 2026, Kadena Town)

● Kadena Language Institute (KLI)

Kadena Town has been operating the [Kadena Language Institute \(KLI\)](#) for nearly 30 years, collaborating with local cultural figures, the U.S. Forces in Okinawa, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other stakeholders to cultivate local youth talent. [I visited the school](#) for the first time on 2 February, where I received explanations from Executive Director Yu Machida and Vice Principal Toshiryu Horii, and observed classes.

Established in 1998, the KLI enrolls up to fifteen young students from Kadena Town each year. Over two years, students study English, IT, Okinawan culture, and business etiquette. Through various programs such as overseas training, internships within U.S. Forces' facilities, English contests, international exchanges, and volunteer activities, the school aims to develop human resources capable of responding to globalization. Every year, Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff are invited to give lectures, and some current and former students have participated in the Ministry's "Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" (TOFU) program and Ministry internships.

I plan to attend the graduation ceremony on 27 February, where I have the opportunity to address the graduates and their families. The Okinawa Liaison Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to support Kadena Town's efforts in human resource development.



"Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" (TOFU) Program Orientation
(23 February 23, at the MOFA Okinawa Liaison Office)

● **"Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" (TOFU) Program**

On February 23, we held an orientation for about 30 participants of this year's "Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" (TOFU) program, who will be dispatched to the United States starting in March.

The [TOFU program](#) sends around 20 to 30 high school and university students from Okinawa—who have lived with U.S. Forces' facilities—to the United States to reflect on Japan-U.S. relations and the future of Okinawa. Last year, after courtesy visits to the Chief Cabinet Secretary and Minister of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo and discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the U.S. Forces Japan,

and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, participants visited key institutions such as the U.S. Congress, the State Department, and the Japanese Embassy in Washington, D.C., as well as the United Nations Headquarters and the Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN in New York, where they also interacted with American high school and university students. Since its launch in 2017, about 200 students have participated in this program, including those selected this year, and [alumni-led Japan-U.S. exchange activities](#) have also begun.

In this orientation, I also attended and gave a greeting, while listening to the participants' self-introductions and their interests. I hope that the participants will make the most of this program and take on the future of Okinawa and Japan-U.S. relations in various fields.

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U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON)
(19 February 2026, at Bankoku Shinryokan)

● U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange

The cultural and educational exchange between Japan and the United States has a long history. In 1961, following an agreement between then-Prime Minister Ikeda and President Kennedy, the [U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange \(CULCON\)](#) was established. From 17 to 19 February, [CULCON 31](#) was held in Okinawa.

About 50 participants from both the public and private sectors of Japan and the U.S. toured various sites across Okinawa and held discussions at Bankoku Shinryokan on current issues such as expanding access to digital resources and subnational exchanges, culminating in the adoption of a joint statement. Mr. Stephen Money, Deputy Director of the Office of Academic Exchange Program in the U.S. Department of State, who also participated in [the MOFA Okinawa Liaison Office visit by Mansfield Fellows](#) on 10 February, was involved in the preparations.

Reflecting on the history of U.S.-Japan relations in Okinawa, I feel encouraged by the steady progress of forward-looking exchanges involving a wide range of stakeholders. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Okinawa Office, we hope to further promote such exchanges and would appreciate your continued cooperation.

KIYA Masahiko

Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs