

**Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs
No.4: Bridging Okinawa and the world**

31 March 2026



Visit of TOFU Program Students to the U.S. Department of State
(20 March 2026, Washington D.C.)

As the fiscal year quickly comes to an end, and spring is already being felt here in Okinawa, I hope you are all doing well. It has been four months since I assumed my post, and my daily work has steadily gotten on track.

In meeting people here, I am often asked why the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a dedicated Ambassador and an office in Okinawa, within Japan. This makes me realize how important it is to clearly communicate the work we do. Since the office was established in 1997, one of our main roles has been to reduce the impact on local residents related to the U.S. Forces' presence in Okinawa. As I introduced in [the previous Okinawa Ambassador's Newsletter](#), we are also actively working to promote mutual understanding through the advancement of Japan-U.S. exchanges in Okinawa.

In addition, we are undertaking various initiatives using the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' resources and networks to help the people of Okinawa deepen their understanding of current international affairs and strengthen exchanges and cooperation with countries around the world fostering co-creation and

development toward peace and prosperity both regionally and globally. In this edition of the Ambassador's Newsletter, I would like to introduce some of our recent activities in this area and invite everyone to think together about what more the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can do to bridge Okinawa and the world.



Visit of TOFU Program Students to the U.S. Congress
(19 March 2026, Washington D.C.)

● TOFU Program: Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States

From March 18 to 25, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized the "Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States (TOFU)" program. Thirty high schools and universities, etc. students from Okinawa visited Tokyo, Washington D.C., and New York. During the trip, they paid courtesy calls, exchanged opinions, and conducted site visits with a wide range of people from both Japan and the U.S. This was the eighth session since the program began in 2017, and a total of 200 students have participated over the years.

In Tokyo, the students met with [Chief Cabinet Secretary Kihara Minoru](#), [State Minister for Foreign Affairs Horii Iwao](#), [State Minister of Defense Miyazaki Masahisa](#), among others. In [Washington D.C.](#), they visited the U.S. Department

of State, the U.S. Congress and the Embassy of Japan, and also interacted with local students. Fortunately, the trip coincided with Prime Minister Takaichi's visit to the United States, allowing the students to watch from the front row as the Prime Minister laid a wreath during a ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery — a valuable experience for all. In New York, they visited the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations and the UN Headquarters, and other institutions; attended a lecture given by Japanese staff members at the UN; and participated in a reception hosted by the Consulate-General of Japan.

A follow-up report session will be held soon in Okinawa. We look forward to hearing the participants' impressions and aspirations, as they take on the future.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs High School Lecture
(16 February 2026, at Okinawa Prefectural Ginowan High School)

● Lectures for Students in Okinawa

The Okinawa Liaison Office (OLO) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) gives lectures and talks about international affairs, Japanese diplomacy, and careers at the Ministry in response to requests from junior high schools, senior high schools, and universities in the prefecture.

Ms Nakamura Kirara, an Assistant Director at our office, is originally from Nago City, Okinawa. On February 16, she gave a lecture to about 400 first- and second-year students at Okinawa Prefectural Ginowan High School about her career at the Ministry and the work of diplomats. After graduating from Kaiho High School, Ms. Nakamura attended a university outside Okinawa and joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2016. She has worked at the Consulate-General of Japan in Karachi, Pakistan, and the Embassy of Japan in the United States, and was assigned to our office in 2024. Speaking to the high school students, she expressed her desire to be “a bridge connecting Okinawa, mainland Japan, and the United States” and offered advice on learning English. In the past, she has also given lectures at schools and universities such as Okinawa Prefectural Kitanakagusuku High School, Naha Kokusai High School, Gushikawa High School, Furugen Junior High School, and Okinawa Christian University.

Deputy Chief Shinohara Ryoko was also invited to give lectures on the latest international affairs and Japanese diplomacy at Meio University in August last year, at Okinawa International University in December, and at the University of the Ryukyus in January this year. I heard that students asked many questions and deepened discussions.

The Okinawa Liaison Office will continue to provide opportunities for people in the prefecture to deepen their understanding of current international affairs, Japanese diplomacy, and careers at the Ministry through lectures and talks by our staff. If you are interested or have any requests, please feel free to contact our office.

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs Internship Post-Report Meeting
(10 February 2026, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Okinawa Liaison Office)

● Ministry of Foreign Affairs Internship

Every summer, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs offers internship opportunities to Japanese university students. The program aims to deepen understanding of the Ministry's activities and Japanese diplomacy, and to broaden the pool of people involved in diplomacy and international relations.

On 10 February, four students from Okinawa who participated in last summer's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [internship](#) held a [post-report meeting](#) at the Okinawa Liaison Office (OLO). Since 2017, the Bank of Okinawa has supported the travel and accommodation expenses of interns from Okinawa every year. This time, Kakazu Takako, General Manager of the Planning Department, and Kawada Takako from the General Affairs Group of the same department attended the meeting as representatives of the Bank of Okinawa.

Students shared their experiences and lessons learned while working in various departments, including the Office for Strategic Communication Hub, Domestic Public Relations Office, the 2025 Japan World Exposition (Expo) Office, and the Secretariat of the 9th Tokyo International Conference on African Development

(TICAD9). On this occasion, I presented a letter of appreciation addressed to Masayasu Yamashiro, President of the Bank of Okinawa, which was received on his behalf by General Manager Kakazu.

Our office will continue to support students in Okinawa so that they can take advantage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs internship opportunities.



Award Ceremony Following the Japan-U.S. Joint Cleanup Activity in Okinawa City (8 March 2026, at Okinawa City Center Community Association Hall)

● Japan-U.S. Joint Cleanup Activity in Okinawa City

This month saw new progress in Japan-U.S. exchanges in Okinawa. On March 8, [a cleanup activity](#) was held on Gate Street in Okinawa City, involving the Center Neighborhood Association, local residents, and U.S. Forces' personnel. Following the activity, Matsuda Kenji, Chairperson of the Center Neighborhood Association, and Hanashiro Daisuke, Mayor of Okinawa City, expressed their gratitude to the U.S. Forces' volunteers, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also conveyed thanks to the Center Neighborhood Association Chairperson.

This cleanup activity has been held weekly since June last year, with Technical Sergeant Edward Sims and Airman First Class Nicolas Cardona from the U.S. Air Force's 18th Wing playing central roles. At the ceremony after the cleanup, Mayor Hanashiro Daisuke and Chairperson Matsuda Kenji presented the certificates of their volunteer work to both of them.

In addition, I, together with Kumagai Naoki, Director-General of the North American Affairs Bureau at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presented a letter of appreciation to Chairperson Matsuda in recognition of his efforts in promoting a safe and secure community through joint patrols and cleanup activities, connecting the local community and the U.S. Forces. We hope that such grassroots exchanges and cooperation between the community and the U.S. Forces will continue to grow and become widely known, leading to deeper mutual understanding and trust.

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The 43rd Japanese Speech Contest for Foreign Residents
(15 February 2026, at Aim Universe Tedako Hall)

● Japanese Speech Contest for Foreign Residents

The connection between Okinawa and the world can be strengthened through foreigners who come to Okinawa from various countries. On 15 February, the Okinawa International Exchange and Human Resources Development Foundation hosted the ["Japanese Speech Contest for Foreign Residents"](#) at Aim Universe Tedako Hall in Urasoe City, co-sponsored by Okinawa Prefecture and Okinawa Television Broadcasting. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs [supported](#) this event, and Deputy Chief Shinohara Ryoko from our office attended as one of the judges.

Twelve speakers from Nepal, Spain, China, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Thailand, Peru, Taiwan, and the Netherlands each gave a seven-minute speech. All speeches were delivered in excellent Japanese and reflected the positive experiences of the participants living in Japan and Okinawa. The speeches were insightful, helping the audience understand differences in culture and perspectives.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs [continues to work](#) closely with related government agencies, organizations, and groups to promote the acceptance of foreign talent and to realize an orderly and harmonious society where foreigners living in Japan can coexist peacefully.



Okinawa Security Symposium (7 March 2026, in Naha City)

● Okinawa Security Symposium

The Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs has regularly participated in various forums and symposia held in Okinawa. On 7 March, [the Okinawa Security Symposium](#) entitled “Increasingly Severe International Situation and Japan’s Security Strategy,” was jointly organized by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) and the Research Institute for Peace and Security (RIPS). Following a keynote speech by former Joint Staff Chief Yamazaki Koji, I participated in the panel discussion as a panelist for the first time in Okinawa. I gave a presentation on the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),” drawing on my previous experience at the Mission of Japan to ASEAN, and joined the discussion.

Currently, Japan faces the most severe and complex security environment since the end of World War II. In this challenging international situation, expectations for Japan are rising. Okinawa Liaison Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue efforts like these to deepen understanding in Okinawa of the changing international situation and Japan's role, and to leverage Okinawa's strengths for Japan and the world. We appreciate your continued understanding and cooperation.

KIYA Masahiko

Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs