

**Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs
No.5: Think of Okinawa's Future**

30 April 2026



TOFU Program Post-Visit Debriefing Session
(26 April 2026, at a hotel in Ginowan City)

The new fiscal year just started! How did you spend this April? For my part, it was a busy month filled with attending events and entrance ceremonies, farewell and introductory visits due to personnel changes, and many new encounters and developments. Among the highlights was the post-visit debriefing session for the "Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" (TOFU) program — one of the largest events organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Okinawa. The session was attended by State Minister for Foreign Affairs HORII Iwao, the students who participated in the program, and representatives from different organizations and generations in Okinawa.

As I attended these various events, I recognized the importance of building on the efforts and achievements of those who came before us and encouraging the next generation to take new actions and advance further. The participants of this

year's TOFU program exactly did this — they not only reflected on Okinawa's future in the United States but also presented concrete action plans for moving forward.

In this edition of the Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs, I would like to think, together with you, what more we can do for the future of Okinawa.



Presentations at the TOFU Program Post-Visit Debriefing Session
(26 April 2026, at a hotel in Ginowan City)

● Post-Visit Debriefing Session for the "Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" (TOFU) Program

On April 26, the debriefing session for the 8th "Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" (TOFU) Program was held in Ginowan City, Okinawa. The event brought together approximately 200 attendees, including the 30 Okinawan high school and university students who participated in the March TOFU program along with their families, alumni of past TOFU programs, members of the National Diet and prefectural assembly, local government leaders including the Governor

of Okinawa, business community representatives, and representatives from the U.S. Consulate General and U.S. Forces in Okinawa.

Following opening remarks by State Minister for Foreign Affairs HORII Iwao and a video overview of the program, five groups of participants delivered presentations — in both Japanese and English — sharing their experiences and proposing recommendations for Okinawa's future. What I found truly impressive was that each group's proposal was concrete, achievable, and driven by the participants themselves. The proposals included:

- [1. Japan-U.S. karate exchange in Okinawa](#)
- [2. A mini diplomats forum led by young people](#)
- [3. An international mutual understanding workshop for junior high school students](#)
- [4. A dialogue program between Okinawan high school students and school trip visitors from other parts of Japan](#)
- [5. "yuntaku" \(discussion meetings\) on culture, coexistence, history, and peace at various locations across Okinawa, culminating in a youth camp involving Japanese and American high school students](#)

I truly look forward to seeing these ideas put into action and developed further in the future.

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Appointment of Japan-U.S. Exchange Student Ambassadors
at TOFU Program Post-Visit Debriefing Session
(26 April 2026, at a hotel in Ginowan City)

● Appointment of Japan-U.S. Exchange Student Ambassadors and Unveiling of the TOFU Logo

Last year, four students were appointed as its first-ever "Japan-U.S. Exchange Student Ambassadors" under the TOFU program. At this year's debriefing event, the four ambassadors reported on their year's activities, which included international exchange initiatives such as a visit to Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, organizing alumni gatherings to connect past TOFU participants, and managing the program's [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts.

At the event, eight new Japan-U.S. Exchange Student Ambassadors were appointed, and letters of appointment from Foreign Minister Motegi were presented to them by State Minister Horii. Not only has the number of ambassadors doubled, but of the eight newly appointed, one is based overseas, two are in Tokyo, and five are in Okinawa — a development that I hope will further expand TOFU's year-round follow-up activities across a wider range of locations.

The event also saw the unveiling of the official TOFU logo, which was selected through a submission and screening process open to past TOFU participants.

At the reception that followed, presentations were also made by "[HelloWorld](#)", an education startup that originated in Okinawa and has since expanded its activities across Japan and beyond, and "[ALOHA](#)", a student organization.

Looking ahead, I hope the TOFU program will grow beyond its current framework of an annual program of about 30 participants. By placing the alumni network at its core, I look forward to seeing its activities expand from Okinawa to the rest of Japan — and ultimately to the world.



TOFU Program Post-Visit Debriefing Session in Kadena Town
(21 April 2026, at Kadena Town Hall)

● TOFU Program Post-Visit Debriefing Session in Kadena Town

The TOFU program relies on the support of a large number of municipalities across Okinawa, from recruiting applicants to managing the program's overall operations. At this year's debriefing session, many municipal leaders were in attendance, and we were able to exchange views on how to further strengthen

the program going forward.

Kadena Town, in particular, has a long-standing tradition of holding its own local debriefing sessions for participants from the town — a practice that has continued even after the introduction of the program-wide debriefing session. On 21 April, a local debriefing session was held at Kadena Town Hall, attended by Mayor TOYAMA Hiroshi, staff from the town office, members of the Kadena Town Board of Education, and school representatives. The two participants from Kadena Town shared their experiences and reflections from the program.

I was truly moved to hear their reports, which were filled with both valuable lessons learned and a renewed sense of purpose for the future. Among the insights they shared were:

"It is only natural that different people hold different opinions — what matters is closing that distance through dialogue."

"Diplomacy is carried out by people, and relationships between nations begin with relationships between individuals."

"Rather than simply promoting Japan-U.S. exchange, I want to pursue exchanges that deepen genuine mutual understanding between the two countries."

I am delighted to see that the outcomes of the TOFU program are being put to good use by people in local communities, thanks in part to its connections with initiatives such as the Kadena Language Institute and the efforts of other municipalities across Okinawa.

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3rd Mayors' Symposium (8 April 2026, at Camp Hansen)

● 3rd Mayors' Symposium (Hosted by the U.S. Marine Corps)

This month also saw progress in dialogue and exchange with the U.S. Forces. On 8 April, the [3rd Mayors' Symposium](#) was held at Camp Hansen. The symposium was hosted by Brigadier General Brian Wolford, Commanding General of Marine Corps Installations Pacific, with the aim of deepening the understanding of mayors and municipal staff from communities hosting U.S. military facilities and areas, and fostering stronger relations between the U.S. Marine Corps and local communities.

Participants from the Japanese side included representatives from Urasoe City, Ginowan City, Kin Town, Ginoza Village, the Okinawa Defense Bureau, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Okinawa liaison Office.

The program included a tour of newly built barracks and a detention facility inside Camp Hansen, lunch at the base dining facility, and a hands-on experience driving tactical vehicles. This was followed by a candid exchange of views on issues of concern to the municipalities, with active discussions on reducing the

impact on local communities and promoting greater exchange and cooperation between local residents and U.S. Forces. Progress was also made on a number of specific issues.

I look forward to continued success in deepening mutual understanding and further reducing the impact on local communities.



America Fest (April 11, 2026, Kadena Air Base)

● Open Base Events at U.S. Military Installations

Many U.S. military installations in Okinawa hold community open base events every year. This year, these events are particularly special, as they also include celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

I had the opportunity to attend three such events: the [Schwab Festival](#) at Marine Corps Camp Schwab in Nago City on March 28, [America Fest](#) at Kadena Air Base on April 11, and the White Beach Festival at the U.S. Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force White Beach facility in Uruma City on April 25.

Each event drew large crowds, including many local residents, who enjoyed live concerts, equipment displays, food festivals and markets, and fireworks. Local mayors, assembly members, municipal staff, representatives from business organizations, and members of the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces were also invited, providing an excellent opportunity to strengthen connections with base commanders and senior military personnel.

I found these annual open base events to be tremendously valuable in fostering friendship and deepening ties between local communities and base personnel, as well as between Japan and the United States more broadly. I would like to express my sincere respect and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the staff at each base and all those involved in organizing these events.



Entrance Ceremony at the Kadena Language Institute
(10 April 2026, at Kadena Town Community Center)

● Think of Okinawa's Future

I believe it is important to build on the various initiatives introduced above — and on the efforts and achievements of all those who have carried them forward —

and to pass them on to the next generation, allowing it to grow and flourish.

On 10 April, the [entrance ceremony of the Kadena Language Institute](#) was held. In the presence of Mayor and Institute's Chairperson TOYAMA Hiroshi and other guests, Institute's Director URASAKI Naoya presented certificates of enrollment to the 15 new students.

In my congratulatory address, I introduced the three types of "chances" described in YAMADA Tomoe's book "Meaning Note": "Glittering Chances" (opportunities that are immediately exciting and appealing), "Straw Millionaire Chances" (small, unexpected opportunities that gradually lead to something greater), and "Spicy Chances" (challenging or uncomfortable opportunities that ultimately lead to growth). Drawing on these ideas, I encouraged the new students to make the most of the opportunity they have been given — to be part of the Kadena Language Institute, an institution founded and nurtured with care to this day by their predecessors.

The Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs and the Okinawa Liaison Office will mark their 30th anniversary next year. Building on achievements that have been realized till today, I am committed to working together with TOFU program participants and a wide range of people across Okinawa to think of Okinawa's future and to continue making every effort to make progress. I look forward to your continued support.

KIYA Masahiko
Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs