

**Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs
No.6: Learn about Okinawa and learn from Okinawa**

29 May 2026



AFRI CONVERSE (15 May 2026, at JICA Okinawa)

Following the Golden Week holidays, May brought a wide variety of events and gatherings to Okinawa. It has now been six months since I took up my post here, and each day continues to bring fresh encounters in new settings.

In early May, U.S. Ambassador to Japan, H.E George Glass, visited Okinawa, and a commemorative reception was held at Bankoku Shinryokan to celebrate the America's 250th anniversary. In mid-May, an interactive seminar on Africa's development — AFRI CONVERSE — was hosted at JICA Okinawa. Later in the month, I attended closing ceremonies for a Japanese supplementary language program, as well as cultural events and social gatherings organized by local municipalities and organizations, and the Okinawa Community Partnership Forum was also convened.

Attending this series of events throughout the month reinforced my sense that it is not enough simply to learn “about” Okinawa — what truly matters is taking what we learn “from” Okinawa and applying it for the benefit of other countries, regions, and the world at large, so that we may grow and develop together. In this edition of the Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs, I would like to explore together what we can do to draw on Okinawa's experiences and culture, and to put those lessons into practice.



AFRI CONVERSE (15 May 2026, at JICA Okinawa)

● AFRI CONVERSE

On 15 May, JICA Okinawa hosted the second session of AFRI CONVERSE 2026, entitled “Designing a World Without Distance: Delivering on ‘Leave No One Behind’ from Okinawa to Africa.” AFRI CONVERSE is an interactive dialogue seminar on Africa’s development, co-organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and JICA. [Held in Okinawa for the first time](#), this session aimed to explore concrete partnerships for advancing innovation and improving access to healthcare. This event was attended by more than 200 participants both in person and online.

Following a keynote address by UNDP Regional Director for Africa Ahunna Eziakonwa, who traveled to Okinawa for the occasion, a panel discussion featured African researchers from OIST and the University of the Ryukyus, an entrepreneur based in Ginoza Village who is expanding a digital prenatal care service across Africa, and a JICA senior advisor who has drawn on Okinawa's experience in remote island healthcare to support the development of medical systems and the training of healthcare workers in the Republic of the Sudan. The discussion underscored that, in order to harness cutting-edge science and technology, it is essential to invest in human resources, improve institutional frameworks, and forge strong partnerships with the government. I was struck by how powerfully Okinawa's experience of overcoming hardship in the difficult postwar years is being put to use in Africa's development.

In my own remarks, I outlined the three pillars — peace, growth, and co-creation — newly articulated by Foreign Minister Motegi in his Africa policy speech earlier this month. I also expressed my hope that Japan and Africa will work together and thrive through co-creation, drawing on the many distinctive strengths that Okinawa can offer.

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Reception Celebrating America's 250th Anniversary
(8 May 2026, at Bankoku Shinryokan)

● Reception Celebrating America's 250th Anniversary

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, and celebratory events are being held across Japan throughout the year. On 8 May, a [reception to mark the occasion](#) was held at Bankoku Shinryokan in Nago City.

[U.S. Ambassador to Japan, H.E. George Glass, who traveled to Okinawa](#) for the event, delivered remarks as host, while Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki offered congratulatory words as a guest of honor. I joined other guests in a toast and a cake-cutting ceremony, celebrating both the Japan-U.S. Alliance and the bonds of friendship between Okinawa and the United States. The reception brought together a wide range of people connected to the bilateral relationship — including representatives from Okinawa Prefecture, local municipalities, the business community, and the U.S. Forces — to mark the 250th anniversary and express hopes for the continued strengthening of Japan-U.S. ties.

In their remarks, Ambassador Glass and Governor Tamaki highlighted the many facets of the relationship between the United States and Okinawa, spanning security, science and technology, education, the economy, tourism, culture, and

sister-city exchanges. The event also featured the unveiling of a special 250th anniversary kariyushi wear design and a commemorative Orion Beer can, a performance of DA PUMP's hit song "U.S.A.," and a fireworks display over the sea — all of which brought to life the warmth and richness of the friendship and exchange between Okinawa and the United States.



2nd Okinawa Community Partnership Forum
(28 May 2026, at Camp Foster)

● 2nd Okinawa Community Partnership Forum

On 28 May, the 2nd Okinawa Community Partnership Forum was held at Camp Foster, co-hosted by Okinawa Prefecture and the U.S. Forces in Okinawa. The forum was established in May last year to bring together representatives from Okinawa Prefecture, U.S. Forces in Okinawa, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Okinawa Liaison Office, the U.S. Consulate General in Okinawa, the Okinawa Prefectural Police Headquarters, and the Okinawa Defense Bureau of the Ministry of Defense, with the aim of advancing discussions on community safety and the strengthening of partnership.

At last year's inaugural forum, both Japanese and U.S. sides shared their respective crime prevention efforts, discussed a range of challenges, and

emphasized the importance of ongoing communication and cooperation between U.S. Forces in Okinawa and local stakeholders. At this year's forum, participants confirmed a number of developments made since then, including the completion of an updated version of the "Okinawa Orientation Overview" — a mandatory briefing for all newly arrived service members in Okinawa.

The forum also addressed new initiatives, including support measures for the spouses of U.S. Forces personnel, accident prevention measures related to pet ownership, and community volunteer activities carried out by U.S. service members. We look forward to continuing this forum and deepening its work further in the years ahead.

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Closing Ceremony of the Japanese Supplementary Language Program
(21 May 2026, at Bechtel Elementary School on Kadena Air Base)

● Japanese Supplementary Language Program

On 20 and 21 May, [closing ceremonies](#) were held at Kadena Elementary School and Bechtel Elementary School, both located on Kadena Air Base, marking the conclusion of the Japanese supplementary language program by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the Department of War Education Activity (DoWEA).

The program offers American children twice-weekly after-school Japanese language classes of approximately one hour each, running over a period of about six months. It has been held annually in Okinawa since 2023. This academic year, approximately 45 children from both schools took part, studying Japanese while also [engaging in exchanges with local children](#).

I attended the closing ceremony at Bechtel Elementary School on May 21 and delivered remarks. In front of school staff and parents, the children proudly showcased what they had learned by giving presentations in Japanese and also

by performing eisa — a traditional Okinawan dance — filling the room with smiles and applause. In my remarks, I encouraged the children to make the most of the Japanese they had learned, to get out and connect with the people of Okinawa together with their families, and to cherish the happiness that those connections can bring.



105th Anniversary Ceremony of the Establishment of Naha City
(20 May 2026, at Naha Cultural Arts Theater Nahāto)

●Attending various events in Okinawa

Every year from April through June, a wide range of organizations in Okinawa hold their annual general meetings. When I was invited to the social gatherings held after these meetings, I had the invaluable opportunity to greet board members and attendees and to hear firsthand about their latest activities.

On 20 May, I attended the [ceremony commemorating the 105th anniversary of the establishment of Naha City](#), held at the Naha Cultural Arts Theater NAHArt. I was deeply moved by the performance in the first part of the program, entitled "[A Gift from the Goddess Unai: The Story of Kamakura Yoshitaro.](#)" The piece tells

the story of Kamakura Yoshitaro, born in Kagawa Prefecture in 1898, who graduated from the Tokyo Fine Arts School and came to Okinawa to take up a post as an art teacher at the Okinawa Women's Normal School. It was this posting that sparked his fascination with the arts and crafts of the Ryukyu Kingdom era, leading him to conduct extensive research and ultimately make a significant contribution to the restoration of Shuri Castle. The performance led me to reflect anew on the profound meaning of the way Okinawan people cherish and carry forward the history and traditions that stretch back to the Ryukyu era — and it also prompted me to ask myself what I, as someone who has come to Okinawa from the outside, might be able to contribute.



Dragon Boat Race at Henoko District
(24 May 2026, at Matsuda nu Hama, Henoko)

● **Learn about Okinawa and learn from Okinawa**

On 24 May, a traditional dragon boat race was held at Matsuda Nu Hama beach in Henoko, Nago City, as part of the traditional event known as "Abushibaree," which prays for a bountiful harvest and safety at sea. With Mayor Toguchi Taketoyo of Nago City and numerous other distinguished guests in attendance,

the race opened with a welcoming address by Tokuda Masakazu, the Henoko District Chief, followed by an athlete's oath and the official declaration of the start of competition. This year's race saw enthusiastic participation from 38 teams, including teams from various neighborhood groups within the Henoko District, as well as local businesses, organizations, the Okinawa Defense Bureau, U.S. Forces in Okinawa, and sports clubs, making it a highly successful event. It served as a wonderful occasion to pass down the region's traditional culture while fostering mutual friendship and goodwill. I myself had the pleasure of taking part in a dragon boat race for the very first time.

Through my work here, I learn something new about Okinawa every day. At the same time, I have come to appreciate how many people are drawn to Okinawa's many distinctive qualities, and how its strengths are being put to use across Japan and around the world. I hope to draw on what I have learned in Okinawa to contribute, even in a small way, to peace and prosperity around the world, making use of my experience and networks at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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