

Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs
No.7: Okinawa Memorial Day (Irei no Hi)

30 June 2026



Joint Performance of Ryukyuan Classical Music
at the Eve Ceremony of the Memorial Ceremony to Commemorate the Fallen in
the Battle of Okinawa (22 June 2026, Okinawa Peace Memorial Hall)

June 23 is Okinawa Memorial Day (Irei no Hi). On this date in 1945, organized Japanese military resistance in the Battle of Okinawa came to an end. Okinawa Prefecture has designated this day as Memorial Day by ordinance, and a series of commemorative events, including the Memorial Ceremony to Commemorate the Fallen in the Battle of Okinawa, has been held annually.

As Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs, this was the first Memorial Day since taking up my post. On June 22, I attended the eve ceremony at Okinawa Peace Memorial Hall, and on June 23, I accompanied Foreign Minister Motegi as he laid flowers at the National War Dead Peace Mausoleum and the Tochigi Prefecture monument, before attending the Memorial Service and laying flowers myself.

On Memorial Day, many people reflect on the history of the Battle of Okinawa, honor those who lost their lives, and renew their commitment to building a peaceful world. I also had the opportunity to speak with high school students from the Northern Territory of Australia, who were visiting Okinawa for a history and peace study program. In this month's Ambassador's Newsletter, I share my thoughts and reflections on attending my first Memorial Day events in Okinawa.



Foreign Minister Motegi Laying Flowers at the National War Dead Peace Mausoleum (23 June 2026, Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Park)

● Memorial Ceremony to Commemorate the Fallen in the Battle of Okinawa

On June 23, Memorial Day (Irei no Hi), the 2026 Memorial Ceremony to Commemorate the Fallen in the Battle of Okinawa was held at Peace Memorial Park in Mabuni, Itoman City, co-hosted by Okinawa Prefecture and the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly. Assembly Speaker Nakagawa delivered the opening address, followed by a moment of silence at noon. The ceremony continued with a memorial address by the President of the Okinawa Prefectural Bereaved Families Association, flower-laying by principal attendees, a Peace Declaration by Governor Tamaki, a reading of the "Poem for Peace" by a student representative, and addresses by Prime Minister Takaichi, House of

Representatives Speaker Mori, and House of Councillors Speaker Sekiguchi. [Foreign Minister Motegi also attended](#), paying his sincere condolences to the souls of those who fell on the battlefield and those who perished in the devastation of the Battle of Okinawa. Minister Motegi also laid flowers at the National War Dead Peace Mausoleum and the Tochigi Prefecture monument.

I accompanied the Foreign Minister at the Memorial Ceremony, paying tribute to the war dead and renewing my commitment to the realization of peace. Since joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1987, I have been involved in issues of war and reconciliation across various roles. On the 50th anniversary of the end of the war in 1995, I handled issues relating to British prisoners of war at MOFA headquarters. On the 70th anniversary in 2015, I worked on peacebuilding in South Sudan. On the 75th anniversary in 2020, while posted in Sydney, I attended numerous Japan-Australia reconciliation events. I am determined to continue my efforts to take to heart the tragedy of the Battle of Okinawa and the feelings of the people of Okinawa, and to reflect them in the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Dedication of Ryukyuan Dance and Miyako Dance
at the Eve Ceremony of the Memorial Ceremony to Commemorate the Fallen in
the Battle of Okinawa (22 June 2026, Okinawa Peace Memorial Hall)

● Eve Ceremony

Around Memorial Day, a number of events were held in addition to the Memorial Ceremony to Commemorate the Fallen in the Battle of Okinawa, including a Peace Prayer Memorial March organized by the Okinawa Prefectural Bereaved Families Association, a "Pillar of Peace Light" event and charity live concert by the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Foundation, and free admission to the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum and Okinawa Peace Memorial Hall. As Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs, I accepted an invitation from the Okinawa Association (a public interest incorporated foundation) and attended the Eve Ceremony at Okinawa Peace Memorial Hall on 22 June.

Okinawa Peace Memorial Hall opened in October 1978 and houses and displays the Okinawa Peace Memorial Statue and a series of paintings entitled "War and Peace," among other works. The Eve Ceremony has been held annually since 1979, shortly after the Hall's opening, and this year marked its 48th edition.

The first part of the ceremony consisted of the lighting of a sacred flame, ringing of a bell, a moment of silence, words of consolation for the souls of the fallen, and flower-laying. The second part featured a dedicated performance of Ryukyuan classical music and a dedication of Ryukyuan dance and Miyako dance, with performers from three schools and five traditions of Ryukyuan classical music, two schools of Ryukyuan koto music, and Ryukyuan dance (including Miyako dance) artists presenting their traditional arts. Many bereaved family members were present in the audience.

Attending this historic ceremony at Okinawa Peace Memorial Hall for the first time and laying flowers, I was deeply moved by the heartfelt traditional performances and felt a profound sense of Okinawa's enduring commitment to peace and its rich cultural heritage.

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Memorial Monument Cleaning
by Japan Self-Defense Forces and U.S. Forces' Volunteers
(13 June 2026, Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Park)

● Memorial Monument Cleaning

Commemorative events are also an opportunity to look back on the past while promoting reconciliation, exchange, and cooperation for the future. On Saturday, June 13, ahead of Memorial Day, volunteers from the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces, the U.S. Forces, SDF supporters, and their families gathered at Peace Memorial Park in Mabuni, Itoman City, to [clean the memorial monuments](#). Despite unfavorable weather, approximately 1,000 participants cleaned the monuments and park grounds with heartfelt respect for the fallen, and [the area was quickly restored to a pristine condition](#).

On Memorial Day itself, a [memorial ceremony was also held, organized by USO Okinawa and the American Chamber of Commerce in Okinawa](#), with large attendance including U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Snipe and U.S. Consul General in Okinawa Au.

Through each of these activities and events, I hope that cooperative relationships for the future will continue to be strengthened, while keeping in mind the tragic devastation of the Battle of Okinawa.



Exchange with High School Students from the Northern Territory
(26 June 2026, MOFA Okinawa Liaison Office)

● History and Peace Study Tour for High School Students from Australia's Northern Territory

This year, coinciding with Memorial Day, seven high school students and two chaperones from Australia's Northern Territory visited Okinawa for a [history and peace study tour](#), under an initiative of the Northern Territory Chief Minister's Office. The group attended the Memorial Ceremony to Commemorate the Fallen in the Battle of Okinawa on June 23, exchanged views with students from Naha Kokusai High School, and visited the Peace Memorial Museum, Himeyuri Monument, Tsushima Maru Memorial Museum, Shimku Gama Cave, Kadena Road Station, Shuri Castle, and other sites. Through these visits, they deepened their understanding of Okinawa's history as well as the history of war, reconciliation, and cooperation among Japan, the United States, and Australia.

During my own tenure as Consul-General in Sydney from 2019 to 2022, I was responsible for the Northern Territory and [attended the Darwin Bombing Memorial Ceremony](#), held every year on 19 February in the Northern Territory. Through these experiences, I came to appreciate that reflecting on the history of war and reconciliation, and sharing that reflection among people from both Japan and Australia, provides a solid foundation for cooperation toward the future.

On 26 June, just after a typhoon had passed, the students visited the MOFA Okinawa Office, where I had the pleasure of hearing about what they had gained from the study tour program. I hope that these young people will go on to lead the way in realizing peace in a new era — for Japan and Australia, and for the Indo-Pacific region and the world.



Uchinanchu Emigrant Day Commemorative Exchange Event
(18 June 2026, Hotel in Naha)

● Uchinanchu Emigrant Day

Shifting to a different topic from Memorial Day, on June 18, the week before, the [Uchinanchu Emigrant Day Commemorative Exchange Event](#) was held in Naha.

The Okinawa Pan-American Association has organized this annual event for over 30 years to coincide with "Overseas Migration Day" on June 18, and last year formally declared June 18 as "Uchinanchu Emigrant Day" — a day of gratitude and solidarity.

In the first part of the event, Ms. Moriyama Michiko, Director of the Okinawa Prefectural Office for the Preparation of the 8th Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival, gave a presentation on the history of emigration and exchange among the approximately 420,000 Uchinanchu (people of Okinawan descent) living abroad, and on preparations for the 8th Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival, scheduled for October next year. In the second part, a social gathering featured performances of dance and song by students of Uchinanchu descent from the United States, Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan, Argentina, and Bolivia.

In my remarks, I conveyed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is committed to strengthening ties with Communities of Japanese Immigrants and Descendants, and that the MOFA Okinawa Office intends to cooperate and contribute to the success of the 8th Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival.

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Itoman Dragon Boat Race (18 June 2026, Itoman Fishing Port)

● Dragon boat racing events across Okinawa

June is the season for traditional dragon boat racing events across Okinawa. On 18 June (the 4th day of the 5th month of the lunar calendar), the Itoman Dragon Boat Race was held to pray for safe seas and abundant catches. The parade around the harbor and the Ugan (prayer) Baare race conducted in accordance with ancient traditional rituals conveyed a deep sense of historical tradition.

Through my first-ever participation in the series of Memorial Day events in Okinawa, I renewed my commitment to honoring the war dead and to the realization of peace. I will continue to deepen my understanding of Okinawa's history, culture and traditions, listen carefully to the voices of the people of Okinawa, and draw on my experience promoting peace, reconciliation, exchange, and cooperation around the world, in my daily efforts to help build a peaceful and prosperous world, starting from Okinawa. I look forward to your continued support.

KIYA Masahiko

Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs