

Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs
No.8: Expanding areas of activities

31 July 2026



Lecture on Latin America and the Caribbean by Mr. Kuroishi Ryo,
Director of the South America Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
(22 July 2026, at JICA Okinawa)

July is drawing to a close. Summer has fully arrived in Okinawa, and the number of tourists around us is gradually increasing. Despite occasional typhoons, we continue our daily work, visiting various locations across the prefecture from our office in Naha.

This month, we attended a series of events that highlight the expanding areas of activities of the Okinawa Liaison Office (OLO) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). These include U.S. Forces-related events such as the Change of Command Ceremony for the Commanding General of the III Marine Expeditionary Force; a grant-awarding ceremony by The Bank of Okinawa for students participating in the MOFA Summer Program (formerly the MOFA internship); a visit and lecture by the Director of the South America Division in

view of the upcoming "World Uchinanchu Festival" scheduled for next year; participation in KOZAROCKS 2026 aimed at fostering startup collaboration; and a networking event between European Capitals of Culture and Okinawan cultural figures. In this month's newsletter, I would like to focus on the expanding areas of activities of our office.



Change of Command Ceremony for Commanding General,
III Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Forces Japan
(15 July 2026, at Camp Foster)

● Change of Command Ceremony

A change of command ceremony is an important occasion for the U.S. Forces to reaffirm the mission and significance of the command, while expressing gratitude to both internal and external stakeholders. On 15 July, the [Change of Command Ceremony](#) was held at Camp Foster, marking the transition from outgoing Commanding General Roger Turner — who completed approximately two and a half years of service — to incoming Commanding General Benjamin Watson. Lt. Gen. Watson also serves as the Okinawa Area Coordinator of the U.S. Forces Japan, the top U.S. Force position in Okinawa.

I have attended many change of command ceremonies, but this one was particularly notable for its high-level attendance, including U.S. Ambassador to Japan, generals from all branches of the U.S. Forces, the three branches of Japan's Self-Defense Forces, and military representatives from the Republic of Korea and the Philippines. The ceremony made a strong impression on all stakeholders — both in Japan and abroad — of the critical role III MEF plays in the region. It was also open to the media and received wide press coverage.

Lt. Gen. Glynn, Commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific, the outgoing Lt. Gen. Turner, and incoming Lt. Gen. Watson each spoke in their own words about the mission of III MEF, offering words of appreciation for the contributions of individual service members and their families.



MOFA Summer Program 2026 Grant Awarding Ceremony
(17 July 2026, at The Bank of Okinawa Head Office)

● MOFA Summer Program

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) offers an internship opportunity for

Japanese university students as part of its "Summer Program." The program aims to deepen participants' understanding of its activities and Japan's diplomacy, while broadening the pool of talent engaged in diplomatic and international affairs. Since fiscal year 2017, The Bank of Okinawa has annually supported students from Okinawa by covering their travel and accommodation expenses.

On 17 July, a [ceremony](#) was held at The Bank of Okinawa's Head Office to present support grants to four university students from Okinawa selected for this year's program. This year, students from Okinawa Christian University, Kadena Language Institute, Meio University, and the University of the Ryukyus will each complete a 10-day internship in the following divisions: the Cultural Exchange and Public Diplomacy Division, the Domestic Public Relations Division, the Emergency and Humanitarian Assistance Division, and the Specialized Agencies Division.

In my message to the students, I expressed my hope that through this program they would gain a deeper understanding of Japan's diplomacy and continue to serve as bridges connecting Okinawa to the rest of the region and the world, contributing to peace and prosperity.



Career Talk at Nago High School by Ms. Nakamura Kirara, Assistant Director, MOFA OLO (24 July 2026, at Nago High School)

● Lectures on a wide range of topics

The MOFA OLO offers lectures by MOFA officials on topics such as international affairs, regional issues, Japanese diplomacy, and MOFA careers, tailored to the needs of schools, businesses, and organizations in Okinawa Prefecture.

Looking ahead to the 8th Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival, scheduled to be held in Okinawa in October next year, Mr. Kuroishi Ryo, Director of MOFA's South America Division (former Deputy Chief of the MOFA OLO), visited Okinawa on 21-22 July. He gave a [lecture](#) at JICA Okinawa for representatives of municipalities and organizations involved in exchanges with overseas Uchinanchu communities, covering recent developments in Latin America, Japan's Latin American diplomacy, and cooperation with Japanese communities in the region (see photo on p. 1). He also held meetings with Okinawa Prefectural Government officials and business leaders. On 22 June, Mr. Funatsu Ryuichi, Director of MOFA's Economic Security Division, gave a [lecture](#) to staff of The Bank of Okinawa at the bank's invitation, covering and key issues of the Middle East and economic security. On 24 July, Ms. Nakamura Kirara, an assistant director at the MOFA OLO who is originally from Nago City, visited Nago High School to speak about her work at MOFA and her experiences as a diplomat — an event that [received media coverage](#). On 22 July, Mr. Takao Sunao, Director of the Japan-US Status of Forces Agreement Division, drew on his experience as an interpreter for the Prime Minister to conduct an interpreting workshop for local government and US military interpreters in the prefecture.

The MOFA OLO welcomes lecture requests at any time. Please feel free to contact us.

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KOZAROCKS 2026
(10 July 2026, at Koza Music Town Oto-Ichiba)

● Collaboration with startups

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs operates a global network of overseas missions, which can support startups in expanding internationally and co-creating solutions to social challenges. To explore collaboration opportunities in Okinawa, I [participated in KOZAROCKS 2026](#), held on 10–11 July at Koza Music Town Oto-Ichiba and the Koza Startup Shopping Street (KSA).

The opening ceremony on the first day featured remarks by Okinawa City Mayor Mr. Hanashiro Daisuke. The opening session, entitled "Okinawa as a Hub City: The Next Stage — Building a Startup Ecosystem Connecting Japan and Asia," included presentations by Mr. Motonaga Hiroyuki, Representative Director of the GW2050 PROJECTS Promotion Council, and Ms. Fujimoto Ayumi, Representative Director of the Startup Ecosystem Association. Although many sessions were cancelled due to a typhoon, a networking event held the following day at the Koza Startup Shopping Street drew a large number of participants.

I took the opportunity to exchange views with stakeholders on future cooperation and collaboration. Drawing on my experience promoting Japan-ASEAN startup cooperation at my previous posting at the Mission of Japan to ASEAN, I look forward to pursuing concrete initiatives going forward.



Meet Up ECoC! – Face to Face – 2026 in Okinawa
(18 July 2026, at Ryugin Hall, Naha City)

● Cultural Exchange between Europe and Okinawa

On Saturday, 18 July, the EU-Japan Fest Japan Committee co-hosted ["Meet Up ECoC! – Face to Face – 2026 in Okinawa"](#) with Okinawa Prefecture and the Cabinet Office Okinawa General Bureau. The event, held at Ryugin Hall, brought together representatives from European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) and Okinawan cultural practitioners for a matchmaking session.

Following presentations by seven European Capitals of Culture, Okinawan artists and practitioners showcased their work across a range of fields, including sanshin (traditional music), Shuri weaving, lacquerware, photography, contemporary art, and music. The event concluded with a "yuntaku" (casual conversation) networking session. European participants also visited various sites across Okinawa for observation and dialogue beyond the event itself.

I [attended all sessions](#), where I learned about Europe-led cultural initiatives with global reach, as well as diverse efforts to promote both traditional and contemporary Okinawan culture. I was encouraged to hear that Okinawan cultural practitioners are already advancing cultural exchange with Europe in collaboration with the Japan Foundation and Japanese diplomatic missions abroad. Drawing on my experience of promoting Okinawan arts — such as eisa dance and bingata textile — at Japan festivals during my posting at the Consulate-General in Sydney, I look forward to supporting Okinawa's international cultural exchange with communities around the world.



Toyohara District Abushi-Baree Dragon Race Tournament – Ugan Baree
(19 July 2026, at Kunji-daa Beach, Toyohara, Nago City)

● Participating in Okinawa's Traditional Events

On weekends, I take part in traditional events across Okinawa to deepen ties with local communities while learning about their culture and history.

On 19 July, I participated in the [Toyohara District Abushi-Baree Dragon Race Tournament](#) at Kunji-daa Beach in Nago City. I competed as a paddler in the inter-

organization race, while Deputy Chief Ms. Shinohara Ryoko had the honour of striking the bell in the Ugan Baree (ceremonial race). We were also treated to pork miso soup at lunchtime. I was truly touched by the warm hospitality of the local community, including Tournament Chairman and Toyohara District Chief Ms. Miyagi Naomi.

The following day, 20 July, I attended the opening ceremony of the [19th Tomigusuku Dragon Race Tournament](#) General Race at Toyosaki Seaside Park Canal. Following an encouraging address by Tomigusuku Mayor Mr. Tokumoto Tsuguto, I watched the exhibition and open races alongside other guests.

I look forward to continuing to participate in various Okinawan events—such as tug-of-war and Eisa—to further deepen my understanding of Okinawa's culture and history. Thank you for your continued support.

KIYA Masahiko

Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs