

Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs
No.10: Importance of Exchange

30 September 2026

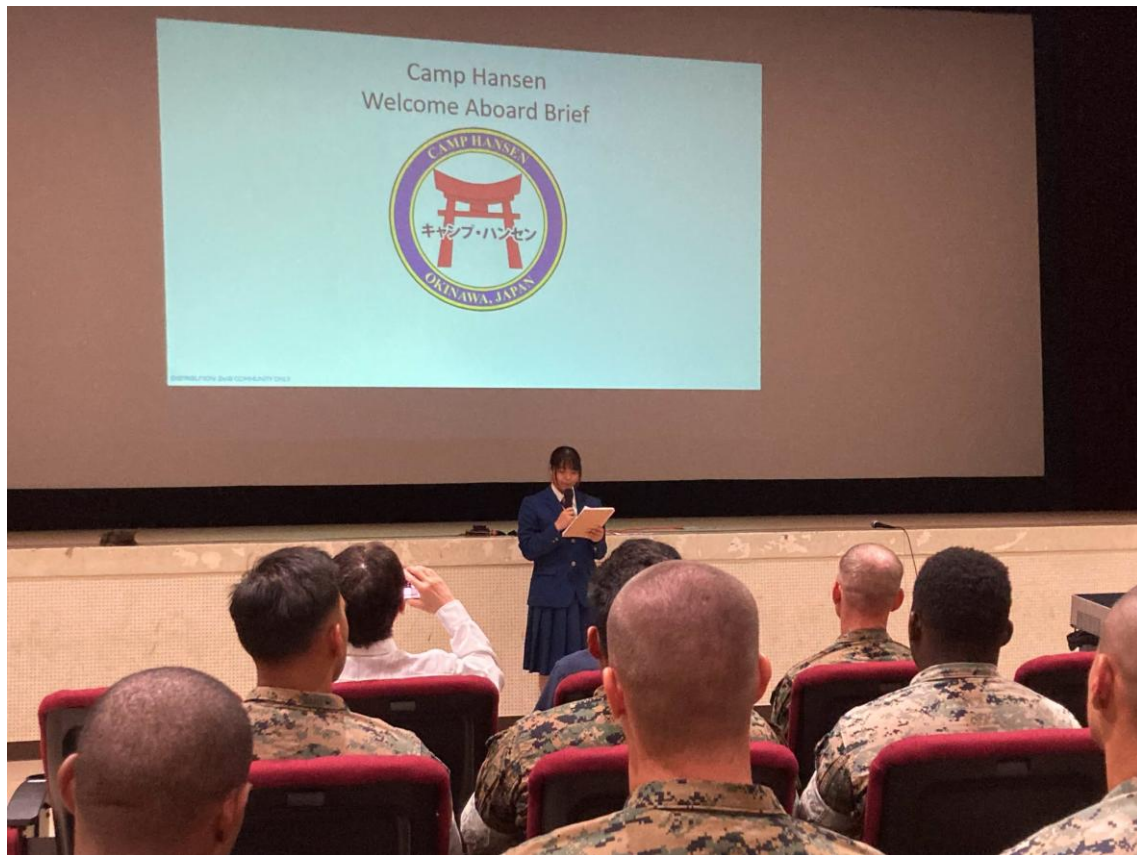


Newcomer orientation for incoming service members
(4 September 2026, at Camp Hansen)

Okinawa remains hot even in September. The Okinawa gubernatorial election was held on 13 September, and newcomer Koja Genta won. The new Koja administration just began today on the 30th. I will continue to listen to people across the prefecture and steadily carry out my daily work.

Looking back on this month's events — a newcomer orientation for incoming service members at Camp Hansen, a mini diplomacy forum at the Kadena Language Institute, a debriefing on Ginowan City's short-term overseas study program for junior high school students, a visit by a delegation from Zanzibar, Tanzania, the Okinawa–Laos Exchange Fair, and the Eisa festivals in Okinawa

City and Uruma City — I was reminded of the importance of promoting broad exchange in Okinawa. In this newsletter, I will focus on the value of exchange and share my thoughts and impressions from these events.



Newcomer Orientation for Incoming Service Members
(4 September 2026, at Camp Hansen)

● Newcomer Orientation for Incoming Service Members

On 4 September, Camp Hansen held an [orientation](#) for about 400 newly assigned service members arriving with a unit rotation. I was invited and attended for the first time. The briefing is designed to help newcomers understand Okinawa's culture and history and to encourage responsible behavior as members of the local community.

In his remarks, [Mayor Kinjo Tsukasa](#) of Kin Town mentioned past incidents and accidents involving U.S. service members, while emphasizing that Kin Town and Camp Hansen have built friendly ties through years of exchange. He asked the new service members to act as part of the community and carry themselves like goodwill ambassadors. Representing local youth, a high school student from Kin

Town who took part in the [“Think of Okinawa’s Future in the United States” \(TOFU\) program](#) in March gave a welcome message in English, introducing Kin Town’s attractions and recommended foods.

The Camp Hansen director and the community relations officer also encouraged newcomers to actively join local cultural events and volunteer activities. I was deeply impressed by the long history of mutual understanding and exchange between Kin Town and Camp Hansen.



Mini Diplomacy Forum (18 September 2026, at the Kadena Language Institute)

● Mini Diplomacy Forum

I was invited to a Mini Diplomacy Forum held at the Kadena Language Institute on 18 September. The event put into practice the [action plan presented by Group 2](#) at the April debrief of the [“Think of Okinawa’s Future in the United States” \(TOFU\) Program](#).

Based on lessons from the TOFU Program, the organizers stressed the importance of mutual understanding: creating a space for serious discussion of

Japan-U.S. relations, overcoming taboos through dialogue, and learning from diverse viewpoints. As a practical step, they organized a discussion session for Kadena Language Institute students and young personnel from Kadena Air Base to talk about differences in culture, lifestyle, and environment between Japan and the United States, deepen understanding of each other's communities, and experience the value of multiple perspectives through dialogue.

Participants completed a pre-event survey on cultures, perceptions, and questions about Okinawa and the United States. The results were compiled and used to guide an English-language discussion. The forum was a valuable experience not only for the participating students but also for the Group 2 students who organized this forum.



Ginowan City Junior High School Students'
Short-Term Study Abroad Program Report Session
(4 September 2026, at Ginowan City Central Community Center)

●Ginowan City Junior High School Students' Short-Term Study Abroad Program

On 4 September, a report session for the Ginowan City Junior High School Students' Short-Term Study Abroad Program was held at the Central Community

Center. After opening remarks by Superintendent of Education Iha, ten participating students each gave a confident, three-minute report in English about their short-term study in Seattle from July 30 to August 13. Families, principals and English department heads from the students' schools, and city staff attended.

Key takeaways the students shared included:

- People will listen even if your English isn't perfect.
- What you say matters more than how you say it.
- America is home to people from many different backgrounds.
- Even wealthy countries have poverty.

Afterwards, Mayor Sakima, Mr. Uehara, President of the Seattle Okinawa Kenjinkai, and a parent representative gave remarks. I was also invited and made remarks, noting that this program offers much more than English study—it includes homestay exchanges and visits to universities and cutting-edge companies—and encouraging the students to use this experience to become bridges between Ginowan, the United States, and other countries.

This was the program's 21st group. Continuing this city-run, annual short-term study abroad program for junior high school students is highly beneficial and greatly expands their future opportunities.

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Visit by a delegation from Zanzibar, Tanzania to MOFA Okinawa Liaison Office
(14 September 2026, at MOFA Okinawa Liaison Office)

●Visit by a delegation from Zanzibar, Tanzania to Okinawa

From 13 to 16 September, a delegation from Zanzibar, Tanzania visited Okinawa. On 14 September, they held [an exchange of views at the MOFA Okinawa Liaison Office](#). Noting many commonalities with Okinawa, such as rich tourism resources and a focus on promoting the blue economy, the delegation chose Okinawa as a destination in addition to Tokyo and Osaka to share expertise and promote exchanges. The visit was prompted by the participation of Tanzania's Ambassador to Japan, H.E. Anderson Gukwi Mutatembwa, in the Okinawa study tour for the Diplomatic Corps co-hosted by MOFA and Okinawa Prefecture in January this year.

I briefed the delegation on the role of the MOFA Okinawa Liaison Office, as well as Okinawa's history and culture, and its business and innovation. Zanzibar is advancing an Island Tourism Policy Forum in cooperation with Jeju Island, Republic of Korea, and expressed a desire to deepen ties with Okinawa. The delegation also visited the Okinawa General Bureau, the Okinawa Institute of

Science and Technology Graduate University (OIST), the University of the Ryukyus, Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium, and Shurijo Castle.

We will continue to support opportunities to leverage Okinawa's strengths on the global stage.



Opening Ceremony of the Laos–Okinawa Exchange Fair
(24 September 2026, Palette Kumoji Traffic Plaza)

● Laos-Okinawa Exchange Fair

The Laos–Okinawa Exchange Fair was held in Naha at the Palette Kumoji Traffic Plaza from 24 to 26 September. On the first day, I attended the [opening ceremony](#) and delivered remarks alongside Lao Ambassador to Japan Ampai Kindavong and other distinguished guests.

Last year marked the 70th anniversary of Japan–Laos diplomatic relations, and high-level visits have continued this year. Okinawa, with its history as a “bridge to all nations,” has also deepened ties with Laos. Since 2017, Co-op Okinawa has worked through the JICA Grassroots Technical Cooperation Program to support

establishing a cooperative for lao-lao rice spirit—said to be a root of Awamori—and to promote exports to Okinawa. After flooding in southern Laos, Okinawan high school students raised funds and visited the affected areas. Mr. Takagi, head of Ryukyu Coffee Energy, a startup from the University of the Ryukyus and the fair’s organizer, is also advancing collaboration with Laos through coffee.

The venue offered tastings of Lao coffee, beer, and food, and displayed handicrafts. In recognition of the fair’s significance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided nominal support and will continue to assist Okinawa’s diverse international exchanges.



Okinawa All-Island Eisa Festival

(6 September 2026, at Koza Sports Park Track and Field Stadium)

● Eisa festivals

After the late-August Obon holidays, it is Eisa season. From 4 to 6 September, Okinawa City hosted the 71st Okinawa All-Island Eisa Festival, where many youth associations and children’s groups from across the prefecture performed one after another. On 19–20 September, the 21st Uruma City Eisa Festival was

held along Prefectural Route 75, featuring not only Eisa but also a parade by groups connected to Uruma City. At both events, not only local residents but also families from the U.S. Consulate General Naha and U.S. Forces stationed in Okinawa took part. They enjoyed authentic, energetic performances and interacted with the mayors of Okinawa City and Uruma City and other officials.

In Okinawa, cultural events such as Eisa, dragon boat races, and great tug-of-war competitions are held throughout the year in many places. For foreign residents in Okinawa, these are valuable opportunities to deepen exchange and understanding with local people, and I feel it is important to keep making the most of them. I also hope to join as many of these cultural events as possible and help promote exchanges across Okinawa.

KIYA Masahiko

Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs