

## Section 4

# Latin America and the Caribbean

## 1 Overview

### (1) Situations in Latin America and the Caribbean

As the free and open international order based on the rule of law faces serious challenges, and the presence of the developing and emerging countries known as the Global South grows, cooperation with countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean (hereafter referred to as “LAC”) region, many of which share values and principles such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, is gaining renewed importance. At the same time, the LAC region has great economic potential, with a population of approximately 660 million and gross regional product of approximately 6.5 trillion U.S. dollars. The region also has abundant mineral resources and energy, which are vital for decarbonization, food resources, and more. As such, the region is becoming increasingly important from the perspective of strengthening supply chain resilience and economic security of the international community, including Japan. While the region's GDP growth rate is projected to be 2.1% in 2024, continuing the positive growth trend since 2022, social challenges such as income inequality and security are still matters of utmost priority for many LAC countries.

In the LAC region, there are the Nikkei (Japanese immigrants and their descendants) communities numbering approximately 3.1 million, or about 60% of the world's Nikkei population.

These communities have fostered a traditional sense of affinity toward Japan in LAC countries through contributions to the local areas for more than a century.

On the other hand, generations have transitioned over 100 years since the Japanese migration began, and the challenge is how to deepen ties between Japan and the communities, including among the younger generation. In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)

has implemented measures to strengthen collaboration with the Nikkei communities, including inviting young Nikkei people to Japan and supporting the holding of events by young Nikkei people in various countries to promote creation of networks. In January 2023, MOFA established the Division for Collaboration with Communities of Japanese Immigrants and Descendants (“Nikkei”) in Latin America. In addition, during Prime Minister Kishida's visit to Paraguay and Brazil in May, Prime Minister Ishiba's visit to Peru and Brazil in November, and Foreign Minister Iwaya's visit to Peru in November, meetings were held with Nikkei people, confirming that collaboration will be strengthened with the Nikkei communities.

### (2) Japanese Diplomacy toward Latin America and the Caribbean Countries

Japan's diplomacy toward the LAC region has developed under the guiding principle of the three “Juntos!!” (meaning “together”) since 2014. In May, Prime Minister Kishida gave a policy speech on the LAC region in Brazil entitled “Paving a Pathway to ‘Human Dignity’ with Latin America and the Caribbean,” updating Japan's guideline for the first time in a decade. In the speech, he outlined the following three key directions: (a) Ensuring the free and open international order based on the rule of law, (b) Overcoming common challenges that humanity faces such as the environment and climate change, and (c) Pursuing prosperity that can be shared by all people in the world and does not come at others' expense. Taking into account changes in the international community and the issues it faces, he indicated Japan's resolve to work together with LAC countries to open a new path through dialogue. In addition, in February in Panama, Foreign Minister Kamikawa announced the Diplomacy Initiative toward Latin

America and the Caribbean. The initiative pursues new forms of cooperation with LAC countries by integrating themes of growing importance, such as the oceans and gender equality, as well as Japan's unique bond with the LAC region through the Nikkei community, into Japan's traditional diplomatic efforts. Under this new guideline for LAC diplomacy and the initiative to implement it, Japan's diplomacy toward the LAC region showed further deepening in 2024.

Following Prime Minister Kishida's visits to Paraguay and Brazil in May, Prime Minister Ishiba made an Official Visit to Peru in November on the occasion of the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting. He also visited Brazil to attend the G20 Rio de Janeiro Summit, where he held a meeting with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Foreign Minister Kamikawa also visited Brazil in February during the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, where she held meetings with the foreign ministers of Brazil, Bolivia, and Mexico. She then visited Panama and paid a courtesy call on President Laurentino Cortizo Cohen. In addition, Foreign Minister Iwaya visited Peru in November to attend the APEC Ministerial Meeting and held a meeting with Foreign Minister Elmer Schialer. Furthermore, State Minister for Foreign Affairs TSUGE Yoshifumi visited Mexico in April. Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs HOSAKA Yasushi also visited Honduras and Guatemala in January; Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana,

and El Salvador in June; and Brazil in July. Many ministers and others from MOFA and related ministries and agencies also visited countries in the LAC region. In Tokyo as well, Foreign Minister Kamikawa, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tsuge, and Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Hosaka continued their dialogue with ambassadors from LAC countries stationed in Japan.

On the economic front, supply chain connections are being strengthened, including the continuing trend of increases in the number of Japanese companies operating in the LAC region, which reached 3,047 in 2023.

Japan is working on promoting free trade together with LAC countries including through the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), in which Mexico, Peru, and Chile participate. In November, the process began for Costa Rica's accession to the CPTPP.

In the field of development cooperation, for some areas of the LAC region that have achieved economic growth, South-South cooperation is being accelerated by countries that have already "graduated" or will "graduate" from the status of recipient countries on the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) List of ODA Recipients by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Japan is promoting triangular cooperation with these countries.

## 2 Regional Organizations

In addition to the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC),<sup>(1)</sup> the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC), the following regional organizations in the LAC region conduct policy coordination on various issues.

### (1) Pacific Alliance

The Pacific Alliance (composed of Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru; hereafter referred to as "PA") aims to promote free mobility of goods, services, and

more within the region and to build a foundation for expansion into the Asia-Pacific region. Singapore is an Associated State to the PA. Japan is an Observer State and places importance on cooperation with the group as it shares common values and principles.

### (2) Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR)<sup>(2)</sup>

In August, with the entry into force of the Protocol of Accession of Bolivia to MERCOSUR, Bolivia joined MERCOSUR alongside Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay,

<sup>(1)</sup> CELAC: Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States)

<sup>(2)</sup> MERCOSUR: Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market)

and Uruguay. (Venezuela is a member but is currently suspended.)

With a few exceptions, tariffs have been eliminated for all goods traded within the MERCOSUR region.

Regarding free trade agreements (FTAs), negotiations are ongoing with countries such as the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Canada. In July, negotiations were launched with the United Arab Emirates, and in December, an agreement was reached in the negotiations with the European Union (EU).

In relation to Japan, the Fifth Dialogue to Strengthen the Economic Relationship between Japan and Mercosur was held in Paraguay in April for the first time in seven years. In November, during a summit meeting between Prime Minister Ishiba and President Lula of Brazil, the two leaders agreed to work together to discuss the Japan-MERCOSUR Strategic Partnership Framework (tentative name) as a forum for discussing win-win cooperation between the two sides in a wide range of areas, including trade and investment.

### (3) Caribbean Community (CARICOM)<sup>(3)</sup>

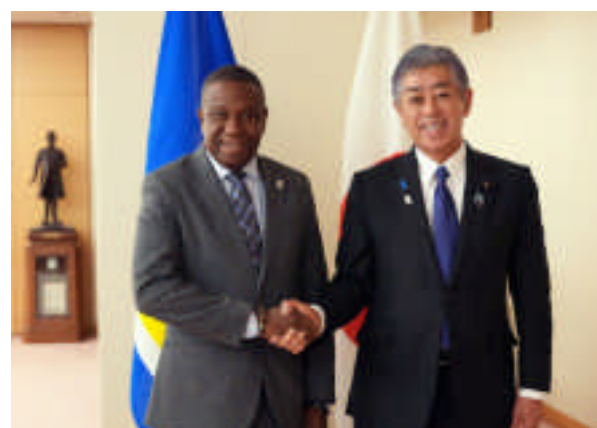
CARICOM was founded by 14 Caribbean nations for economic integration and foreign policy coordination. It has a large presence in the international arena due to its coordinated actions. Although CARICOM countries include many countries with relatively high incomes, they are threatened by natural disasters such as catastrophic hurricanes almost every year and also face vulnerabilities particular to small island states due to the small size of their populations and economies.

Japan is leading its diplomacy in accordance with the three pillars for Japan-CARICOM cooperation. Japan is also providing support to high-income level countries based on their development needs and economic capabilities. Cooperation progressed in 2024, designated as Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024, including the Eighth Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference.

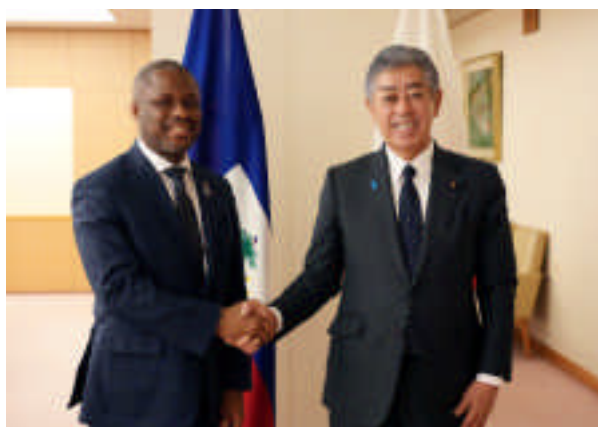
In Haiti, since the assassination of the president in 2021, political instability has led to stagnation



Japan-Belize Foreign Ministers' Meeting (December 14, Tokyo)



Japan-Saint Lucia Foreign Ministers' Meeting (December 14, Tokyo)



Japan-Haiti Foreign Ministers' Meeting (December 13, Tokyo)



Japan-Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Foreign Ministers' Meeting (December 14, Tokyo)

<sup>(3)</sup> CARICOM: Caribbean Community (Member countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Grenada, Jamaica, Suriname, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, Bahamas, Barbados, and Belize)

## COLUMN

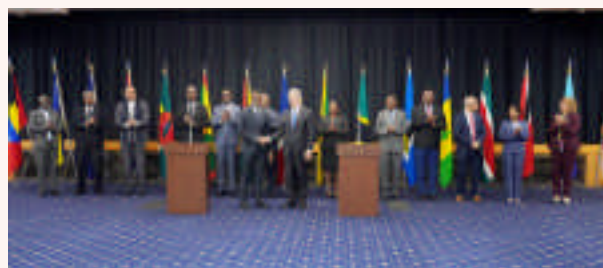
## Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024

## ■ Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024

The year 2024 was celebrated as the strengthening of cooperative relations between Japan and Caribbean countries (See the Opening Special Feature). Because 2024 marked the 30th anniversary of the start of the Japan-CARICOM (Caribbean Community) Consultations, as well as the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, it was designated as “Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024.” Commemorative events were held in both Japan and CARICOM member states through public-private cooperation, deepening mutual understanding.

## ■ High-Level Exchanges

In February, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Kamina Johnson Smith of Jamaica visited Japan as a guest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). In March, Secretary-General of the CARICOM Carla Natalie Barnett visited Japan upon the invitation of MOFA. In December, which marked the conclusion of the Friendship Year, representatives from 14 CARICOM member states and the CARICOM Secretariat gathered in Tokyo to participate in the Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference, which resulted in the issuance of the Ministerial Joint Statement. Foreign ministers from 12 CARICOM member states attended and held bilateral meetings with Foreign Minister Iwaya, making 2024 a year of active high-level exchanges. In 2025 as well, mutual visits by dignitaries are scheduled, and Japan will continue to strengthen its relations with the Caribbean countries.



Foreign Minister Iwaya shakes hands with Foreign Minister Vince Henderson of Dominica (Co-chair) and foreign ministers of CARICOM member states (December 14, Tokyo)

## ■ Cooperation Between Japan and CARICOM Member States

The presence of CARICOM member states is growing, as they make up about 7% of the United Nations member states and play important roles in the international arena.

Japan and CARICOM member states have steadily expanded and deepened their cooperative relationship under the three pillars announced in 2014: (1) Cooperation towards sustainable development; (2) Expanding fraternal bonds of cooperation and friendship; and (3) Cooperation in the international arena.

Meanwhile, over the past ten years, the environment surrounding Japan and CARICOM member states has completely changed. Intensifying global issues such as climate change have become more severe, and the free and open international order based on the rule of law that Japan and CARICOM member states have jointly upheld is now facing open challenges.



Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year Reception (March 26, Iikura Guest House, MOFA, Tokyo)

Amid such circumstances, it is increasingly important to strengthen relations with CARICOM member states, which have a strong sense of responsibility in addressing global issues. Although geographically distant, Japan and CARICOM member states will continue to promote cooperation in the international arena, coordination of bilateral policies, strengthening of economic relations, development cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges, under their global partnership based on shared values and principles.



Logo for Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024



of administrative and legislative functions, and the humanitarian situation for the population has worsened due to the influence of armed groups (gangs). In response, in June, at the request of the Government of Haiti, a Multinational Security Support Mission began operations based on a UN Security Council resolution. In light of the dispatch of this mission, Japan decided to provide an additional 17 million U.S. dollars in support aimed at improving the security and humanitarian situation.

### 3 LAC Countries

#### (1) Mexico

A presidential election was held in June in Mexico, and the ruling party candidate Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo was elected with a high vote share of approximately 60%, assuming the presidency in October. In addition, in the federal upper and lower house elections held on the same day, the ruling coalition secured nearly enough seats to amend the Constitution in both houses.

In regard to relations with Japan, in February, Foreign Minister Kamikawa, who was visiting Brazil to attend the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, held a foreign ministers' meeting with Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alicia Bárcena Ibarra. In April, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tsuge visited Mexico to attend the Congreso Nacional Nikkei (CONANI) and Expo Japón. In addition, from September to October, Ambassador on Special Mission NAKASONE Hirofumi (Member of the House of Councillors) visited Mexico and attended President Sheinbaum's inauguration ceremony, in addition to holding a meeting with incoming Secretary of Economy Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon and others.

In regard to economic relations, Japanese companies have continued to expand into Mexico in the context of nearshoring (establishing supply sources close to consumer markets), reaching about 1,500 companies, the highest number in the LAC region.

#### (4) Central American Integration System (SICA)<sup>(4)</sup>

SICA was established in 1992 with the aim of promoting regional economic and social integration and achieving peace, freedom, democracy, and development. Its eight member countries are El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, Belize, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic.

Since 1995, Japan has held policy consultations with SICA member countries through the Japan-Central America Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation. Since 2010, Japan has served as an external observer and held high-level dialogue with SICA.

During the September meeting between Ambassador on Special Mission Nakasone (Member of the House of Councillors) and incoming Secretary of Economy Ebrard, they shared recognition of the importance of bilateral relations, particularly economic relations, and confirmed that both countries would further strengthen relations under their new administrations.

In regard to relations with third countries, Mexico traditionally places importance on its relations with the United States (U.S.) and the LAC region. In September, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and President-elect Sheinbaum held a meeting with President Lula of Brazil prior to his inauguration ceremony. At President Sheinbaum's inauguration ceremony in October, heads of state and ministers from various LAC countries, as well as heads of international organizations were in attendance, and President Sheinbaum held a meeting with President Miguel Díaz-Canel of Cuba.

#### (2) Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Panama, Honduras, and Belize)

In regard to relations with El Salvador, the inauguration ceremony for President Nayib Armando Bukele Ortiz, who was elected for a second term in February, was held in June, and Parliamentary Vice-Minister for

<sup>(4)</sup> SICA: Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana

Foreign Affairs Hosaka attended as an Ambassador on Special Mission. In addition, in October, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Adriana María Mira De Pereira visited Japan for the second time following her visit in June. Vice Minister Mira and Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Hosaka signed a memorandum on the establishment of a policy consultation mechanism between Japan and El Salvador and held the first Japan-El Salvador Policy Consultation.

In regard to relations with Guatemala, Ambassador on Special Mission Hosaka (Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs) attended the inauguration ceremony for President César Bernardo Arévalo de León held in January, and paid a courtesy call on the President. In May, Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos Ramiro Martínez visited Japan, and a Japan-Guatemala Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held.

In regard to relations with Costa Rica, in August, First Vice-President Stephan Brunner Neibig visited Japan on behalf of President Rodrigo Chaves and attended the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony for the first time at the ministerial level. He also held consultations with Chief Cabinet Secretary HAYASHI Yoshimasa. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship Arnoldo André, who accompanied the Vice-President, held a foreign ministers' meeting with Foreign Minister Kamikawa.

In regard to relations with the Dominican Republic, 2024 marked the 90th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Dominican Republic, and various commemorative events were held in both countries. In the presidential election held in May, incumbent President Luis Rodolfo Abinader Corona was re-elected. Ambassador on Special Mission WATANABE Hiromichi (Member

of the House of Representatives) attended the presidential inauguration ceremony held in August and paid a courtesy call on the President, among other activities. In addition, the third Japan-Dominican Republic Policy Consultation was held in February.

In regard to relations with Panama in 2024, which marked the 120th anniversary of the establishment of Japan-Panama diplomatic relations, congratulatory messages were exchanged between the leaders in conjunction with the date of the establishment of diplomatic relations, January 7. Commemorative ceremonies were held in both Japan and Panama, and the introduction of visa exemption for short-term stays by Panamanian nationals was announced. In addition, in February, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Panama and paid a courtesy call on President Laurentino Cortizo Cohen. Furthermore, in the presidential election held in May, candidate José Raúl Mulino of Realizando Metas (RM) party was elected. Ambassador on Special Mission IMAMURA Masahiro (Member of the House of Representatives) attended the presidential inauguration ceremony held in July and paid a courtesy call on the President, in addition to holding meetings with the outgoing and incoming foreign ministers and the Administrator of the Panama Canal Authority.

In regard to relations with Honduras, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Hosaka visited the country in January and paid a courtesy call on President Xiomara Castro, as well as exchanging views with the secretary of foreign affairs, the president of the National Congress, and others. In June, Private Secretary of the President of Honduras Manuel Héctor Zelaya Castro visited Japan and exchanged views with Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism SAITO



Japan-Guatemala Foreign Ministers' Meeting (May 22, Tokyo)



Japan-Costa Rica Foreign Ministers' Meeting (August 8, Tokyo)

Tetsuo and Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Hosaka, among others, regarding the interoceanic railway project being promoted by the Government of Honduras.

The Alliance for Development in Democracy (ADD), established in 2021 by Costa Rica, Panama, and the Dominican Republic, aims to promote development, cooperation, trade, and investment through highly transparent processes that respect human rights in the region, while coordinating with the U.S., which positions the Alliance as a group that shares common values and principles. In July, prior to the holding of elections in Venezuela, the ADD issued a statement requesting that the elections be conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner.

### (3) Cuba

The domestic economy has worsened to an extremely serious degree, including the key industry of tourism. Nationwide large-scale blackouts in October and natural disasters have made the lives of the Cuban people increasingly difficult. In response to the damage caused by Hurricane Rafael in November, Japan provided emergency assistance.

### (4) Brazil

The administration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva worked on initiatives such as launching the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty under the Brazilian G20 presidency. It also positioned environmental and climate change measures as key policy issues. In August, Brazil held the Amazon Summit in Belém in northern Brazil with participation by eight member countries of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, working to address global challenges.

In regard to relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Rio de Janeiro in February to attend the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting. She held a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mauro Vieira, during which she announced Japan's contribution to the Amazon Fund,<sup>(5)</sup> the first by an Asian country. In May, Prime Minister Kishida made an Official Visit to Brazil, the first by a Japanese prime minister in 10 years. During the summit meeting with President Lula, the



Policy Speech by Prime Minister Kishida at the University of São Paulo (May 4, São Paulo, Brazil; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)



Japan-Brazil Summit Meeting (November 19, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)



Prime Minister Ishiba meeting with Nikkei people and Japanese national residents in Rio de Janeiro (November 19, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

two leaders launched the Japan-Brazil Green Partnership Initiative (GPI) to take cooperation on the environment, climate change, and sustainable development to an even higher level. In addition, in November, Prime Minister Ishiba visited Brazil to attend the G20 Rio de Janeiro Summit and held a meeting with President Lula, confirming that the two countries would further strengthen bilateral relations in 2025, the 130th

<sup>(5)</sup> A fund established by the Government of Brazil with the aim of protecting the Amazon rainforest.



anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Brazil.

Moreover, in regard to economic relations, public and private sector dialogue toward strengthening economic relations between the two countries is being invigorated, including a meeting of the Wise Group for Strategic Economic Partnership between Japan and Brazil held in April, and a meeting of the Japan-Brazil Business Council held in November.

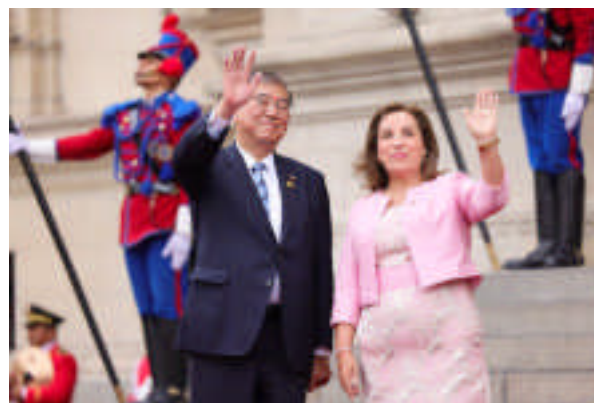
### (5) Argentina

President Javier Milei, who took office in December 2023, has made economic and fiscal reconstruction the top priority of his administration. Under his belief in libertarian principles, he has advanced initiatives such as fiscal austerity and deregulation, as pledged in his campaign, and has achieved a certain degree of results in reducing the budget deficit, curbing inflation, and improving the investment environment through the implementation of a large investment incentive scheme. On the other hand, challenges remain, such as managing the legislature with a minority government administration, addressing the rise in the poverty rate, further deregulation, and achieving economic growth that can be sensed by the public.

In regard to relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a foreign ministers' telephone call with Minister of Foreign Affairs, international Trade and Worship Diana Mondino in January. In March, Minister Mondino visited Japan as a guest of MOFA. During their meeting, the two foreign ministers confirmed the importance of strengthening bilateral relations through the Nikkei community and other means, as well as cooperation in the international arena as important "strategic partners" that share fundamental values and principles. Furthermore, in June, at the G7 Apulia Summit held in Italy, Prime Minister Kishida had an informal talk with President Milei, marking their first interaction, in which they concurred on advancing cooperation between the two countries in the international arena.

### (6) Peru

As the APEC Chair for 2024, Peru held meetings across various fields, including the Leaders' Meeting, under the theme of "Empower. Include. Grow."



Welcoming ceremony during Prime Minister Ishiba's Visit to Peru (November 17, Lima, Peru; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)



Prime Minister Ishiba meeting with Nikkei people residing in Peru (November 17, Lima, Peru; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)



Japan-Peru Foreign Ministers' Meeting (November 13, Lima, Peru)

In regard to relations with Japan, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs KOMURA Masahiro visited Peru in May to attend the APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT) Meeting. In November, Prime Minister Ishiba and Foreign Minister Iwaya visited Peru to attend the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting and APEC Ministerial Meeting, respectively. During this time, Prime Minister Ishiba paid an Official Visit and held a summit meeting with President Dina



## COLUMN

## The Underlying Theme of the “Pathway” Demonstrated by Japan and the Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) Region During the “Year of Latin America and the Caribbean”

In May, Prime Minister Kishida visited Brazil and delivered a speech on Japan's foreign policy toward the LAC region, which was the first such speech by a Japanese prime minister in ten years. In it, he reflected on the history between Japan and the LAC region, recalling how LAC countries lent a helping hand to Japan during pivotal moments in Japan's modern history, such as the Meiji Restoration and the post World War II period. He introduced the fact that through a long history of friendship and cooperation, the relationship between the two sides has flourished into an important partnership in which the two countries respect and learn from each other. He also emphasized that as the international order faces new challenges and freedom and democracy are under threat now, it is precisely the time for Japan and the LAC region to look back on the “paths” they have taken together and to show a new “pathway” toward a better future. He called for cooperation rather than division and confrontation, and for making “diversity” and “inclusiveness” the basic premise for resolving issues.

At the close of the speech, he noted that both Japanese and Spanish languages have poems about a “path,” introducing “*Dotei*” by TAKAMURA Kotaro and a poem by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado. Takamura's verse, “There is no road before me. / But a road is created behind me,” resonates beautifully with Machado's nearly contemporaneous verse, “Traveler, there are no roads. / Roads are made by walking.” Is this merely a coincidence? In Japan, many children learn Takamura's “*Dotei*” in elementary school. In Spain and the LAC region, many people have memorized the beginning of Machado's “Traveler” poem. In other words, the notion of forging one's own path has been cultivated as a life lesson in both Japan and the LAC region, transcending geographical distance and cultural differences. This way of thinking can be seen as the underlying theme that Japan and the LAC region have demonstrated as they shared values and principles while respecting diversity throughout their long history of exchange.



TAKAMURA Kotaro (Photo: Hanamaki Takamura Kotaro Museum)



Antonio Machado



Prime Minister Kishida delivering a speech on Japan's foreign policy toward the LAC region (May 4, São Paulo, Brazil; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

The year 2024 was positioned as the “year of Latin America and the Caribbean,” constituting a favorable opportunity to strengthen Japan-LAC relations, in light of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting held in Peru, the G20 Summit held in Brazil, and commemorative events such as those of Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024. However, no matter how favorable the opportunity, it cannot be fully leveraged without the will to turn the “unknown” in front of us into a “path” through our own efforts, and without respect and trust toward others.

The year 2025 marks several milestones, including the 130th anniversary of the establishment of Japan-Brazil diplomatic relations and Japan-SICA (Central American Integration System) Friendship Year 2025 (marking the 90th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and five Central American countries<sup>1</sup>). The 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP30) will also be held in Brazil. Following on from 2024, the year 2025 will also be positioned as part of the “Years of Latin America and the Caribbean,” and it is hoped more than ever that Japan and the LAC region will continue to move forward together, pioneering new “paths” not only for their own national interests but also for the stability of the international community as a whole and the resolution of shared issues facing humanity.

1 Five Central American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras

Boluarte. Taking into account the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Peru in 2023, the two leaders adopted a joint statement and a roadmap for building broad cooperation over the next decade. Foreign Minister Iwaya also held a foreign ministers' meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmer Schialer, in which they confirmed the need to further strengthen bilateral relations.

### (7) Chile

The administration of President Gabriel Boric, which was inaugurated in March 2022, aims to reduce disparities and improve welfare, and is touting promotion of reform of social security policies, including pensions and the tax system. However, the ruling leftist party, which supports the administration, is in the minority in both the upper and lower houses of the National Congress, making it difficult for the administration to implement its various policies. In regard to the new constitution-drafting process, the new draft constitution, which was prepared mainly by the Constitutional Council that was formed in June 2023, was rejected in a national referendum held in December. President Boric announced the end of the new constitution-drafting process during his term.

In regard to relations with Japan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Gloria de la Fuente González visited Japan in June, during which the 10th Japan-Chile Policy Dialogue was held. In this policy dialogue, both countries concurred on deepening cooperative relations in a wide range of fields, including climate change, disaster risk reduction, space, gender equality, and the oceans.

### (8) Uruguay

The Luis Lacalle Pou administration, which was inaugurated in March 2020, has maintained a high approval rating with its stable management since its inauguration to the second half of the current term (as of the end of 2024). Uruguay ranked first in the LAC region in the Democracy Index.<sup>(6)</sup> In economic policy, the administration adheres to free trade principles and places importance on market expansion and liberalization. In terms of foreign policy, it has developed

diplomacy based on the values of democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights.

In November, a presidential election was held in conjunction with the end of the incumbent president's term. The opposition candidate Yamandú Orsi, from the Broad Front, was elected as the next president and is scheduled to take office in March 2025.

### (9) Paraguay

President Santiago Peña Palacios, who took office in August 2023, continues to uphold values and principles such as the rule of law and respect for human rights. He promotes a free and open economic policy, focusing on attracting investment and job creation.

In regard to relations with Japan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Rubén Darío Ramírez Lezcano visited Japan in March and held meetings with Chief Cabinet Secretary Hayashi and Foreign Minister Kamikawa. In May, Prime Minister Kishida visited Paraguay, marking the second such visit by a Japanese prime minister since 2018. During his summit meeting with President Peña, the two leaders concurred that as important partners sharing common values and principles, Japan and Paraguay will cooperate and strengthen relations in wide-ranging fields.



Joint Press Conference following the Japan-Paraguay Summit Meeting (May 3, Asunción, Paraguay; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

### (10) Colombia

The Gustavo Francisco Petro Urrego administration, which was inaugurated in August 2022 as Colombia's first left-wing government, advocates for a "Government of Change." Its main policies include

(6) Source: Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2022

inclusive social reforms to address inequality, a transition to a decarbonized economy, and total peace. However, the administration faces difficulties in managing the legislature due to internal conflicts within the coalition government, and no prospects are currently in sight for passing various reform bills. Toward total peace with domestic armed forces, the Petro administration is attempting to advance peace negotiations with armed forces such as the National Liberation Army (ELN),<sup>(7)</sup> but a path to total peace has yet to emerge.

In regard to relations with Japan, President of the Senate Iván Name visited Japan in February at the invitation of the House of Councillors and exchanged views with the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the House of Councillors. In addition, in September, the first meeting of the Joint Committee between Japan and the Republic of Colombia on Cooperation in Trade, Investment and Industry was held in Colombia, during which representatives from both countries' public and private sectors confirmed that the two countries will advance bilateral trade and investment promotion.

### **(11) Venezuela**

In the presidential election held in July, incumbent President Nicolás Maduro declared victory. However, candidate Edmundo González of the opposition Unitary Platform claimed that based on the opposition's own investigation, he had won more than 67% of the vote and thus won the election. In response to the election results, protest demonstrations occurred in various parts of the country. According to media reports, more than 20 people were killed and over 1,100 were arrested. The transparency of the electoral process, including vote counting, has been called into question both domestically and internationally. The Maduro administration expelled the Venezuelan-based diplomats of Argentina, Costa Rica, Peru, Panama, and Uruguay, which recognized candidate González as the winner of the election, as well as of Chile and the Dominican Republic, which raised doubts regarding the transparency of the electoral process. In addition, the Maduro administration recalled Venezuelan

diplomats stationed in those countries. Meanwhile, countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Honduras expressed their support for President Maduro, and a serious division has emerged within the LAC region over the situation in Venezuela. Regarding this election, Japan has called for ensuring the transparency of the presidential election process by disclosing all information necessary to support the reliability of the voting results so that the will of all Venezuelans who casted their ballots is respected.

In September, an arrest warrant was issued for the opposition Unitary Platform candidate Edmundo González, who subsequently went into exile in Spain. In response, countries including the U.S., Germany, and France as well as the EU issued statements criticizing the Maduro administration. In addition, in September and November, the U.S. announced additional individuals subject to sanctions against Venezuela. The Maduro administration reacted strongly, and tensions between the two sides have intensified.

Due to the worsening economic, social, and humanitarian situation in the country, Venezuelan nationals are continuing to flow into neighboring countries as refugees and migrants, and receiving them has become a regional challenge.

Japan has provided 130 million U.S. dollars in assistance to support both Venezuelan people, including people fleeing from Venezuela, and surrounding countries.

### **(12) Bolivia**

In Bolivia, in relation to the presidential election scheduled for 2025, there is a conflict between former President Juan Evo Morales Aima, who has declared his candidacy, and President Luis Alberto Arce Catacora, who is seeking re-election. There is ongoing turmoil, including road blockades carried out by Morales supporters and clashes between those supporters and the police.

Regarding the economy, Bolivia's economic structure depends on exports of natural resources. However, the country's budget deficit is ballooning and foreign currency shortages are becoming more serious due to a sharp decline in natural gas reserves. On the other

<sup>(7)</sup> ELN: Ejército de Liberación Nacional, National Liberation Army



hand, Bolivia's estimated lithium resources are the largest in the world.

The Bolivian government has intensified its efforts toward lithium exploration and extraction, including signing an agreement in September with a Russian company and another in November with a Chinese company for the construction of lithium plants.

In regard to relations with Japan, 2024 marked the 110th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bolivia, as well as the 125th anniversary of Japanese immigration to Bolivia. Throughout the year, various commemorative events were held in both countries. In February, the first Japan-Bolivia Foreign Ministers' Meeting in approximately 11 years was held, in which the ministers confirmed further strengthening of bilateral relations. In addition, in April, on the occasion of the ceremony held in Bolivia to commemorate the 110th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bolivia, Foreign Minister Kamikawa delivered a congratulatory video message. In October, Japan provided emergency relief goods in response to the damage caused by forest fires in the country, in light of the humanitarian perspective and the close relations

between Japan and Bolivia.

### (13) Ecuador

The administration of President Daniel Noboa, which was inaugurated in November 2023, declared a 60-day nationwide state of emergency in January following the prison escape of a criminal organization leader. Through a presidential decree, the administration also declared that the country was in a state of armed conflict with criminal organizations. The administration has since taken steps to restore public safety, including the construction of large-scale prisons and strengthening controls at borders and ports. In addition, in response to a historic drought and the resulting decline in the capacity of hydroelectric power generation, which is a major power source, the administration implemented planned power outages.

In regard to relations with Japan, Ecuador continued to serve as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) alongside Japan in 2024, as it also did in 2023. The two countries cooperated on responses to the current severe international situation and on strengthening the functions of the UN, including UNSC reform.

## COLUMN

## Fraternal Bonds

— The 110th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Bolivia and the 125th Anniversary of Japanese Immigration to Bolivia

Bolivia is a geographically distant nation located on the opposite side of the world from Japan. However, many people may have seen photos of the Andes Mountains, which are over 4,000 meters high, and Salar de Uyuni, which is said to be the largest salt flat in the world. Here, this column introduces the long history of friendship between Japan and Bolivia.

### ■ A History of Friendship

In 2024, Japan and Bolivia celebrated the 110th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations and the 125th anniversary of Japanese immigration to Bolivia. In February, the first Japan-Bolivia Foreign Ministers' Meeting in approximately 11 years was held, during which Foreign Minister Kamikawa and Minister of Foreign Affairs Celinda Sosa Lunda concurred on strengthening bilateral relations. In March, a commemorative logo representing the two anniversaries was announced. In April, a commemorative ceremony for the 110th anniversary of the establishment of Japan-Bolivia diplomatic relations was held in Bolivia, and Foreign Minister Kamikawa sent a video message expressing her congratulations. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the two countries are further building their close relationship.

The first Japanese immigrants to Bolivia arrived in 1899. Among those who had initially migrated to Peru, some crossed the Andes Mountains and settled in Bolivia. After World War II, Japanese immigrants faced great hardship developing the land in the Okinawa and San Juan settlements, which were Nikkei (Japanese immigrants and their descendants) communities established near Santa Cruz in eastern Bolivia. However, through activities such as rice and soybean cultivation and poultry farming, these immigrants helped develop the region into one of Bolivia's leading agricultural production areas. Today, more than 13,000 Nikkei people live throughout Bolivia, playing a vital role as bridges of friendship between Japan and Bolivia.

### ■ Cooperation with Bolivia

In June, forest fires began in Bolivia and spread across the country, resulting in casualties, many people being affected, and material damages. In October, the Government of Japan provided emergency relief goods to Bolivia in order to support people affected by the disaster. In addition, Japan has been engaged in supporting Bolivia for many years. Focusing on key areas such as “developing economic infrastructure and diversifying the production sector” and “promoting social inclusion,” Japan has cooperated toward Bolivia's development in various fields. These fields include the construction of Viru Viru International Airport in Santa Cruz, the paving and improvement of the Okinawa Road connecting Nikkei settlements, renewable energy development, construction of school buildings for educational facilities, and provision of medical equipment.

### ■ Toward the Future

The number of Nikkei people in Bolivia is the fifth highest in the Latin American and the Caribbean region. Among them, Nikkei people in Bolivia are enthusiastic about Japanese language education, with young people who speak Japanese. Japanese culture continues to be passed down in the Japanese settlements, where traditional Japanese festivals are held.

It is expected that Japan and Bolivia will continue to nurture their fraternal bonds and cooperate together through various exchanges.



Foreign Minister Kamikawa and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sosa at the Japan-Bolivia Foreign Ministers' Meeting (February 22, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)



The logo commemorating the two anniversaries. It features motifs such as the national flags of both countries and the kanji character “絆” (*kizuna*, which means bonds) at the center.



The emergency relief goods handover ceremony in response to forest fire damages (October 9, Santa Cruz, Bolivia)