Initiatives to Further Deepen Ties between Japan and the Caribbean States and Regions: Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024

The year 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of the start of the Japan-CARICOM (Caribbean Community[1]) Consultations, as well as the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Jamaica, and Japan and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Here, we present an outline of the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024, an initiative established to commemorate these anniversaries, and the Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference.

The 8th Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chiyoda City, Tokyo)

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

Japan's relations with CARICOM countries

The CARICOM countries, which represent 7% of the United Nations membership, have a strong voice in the international arena through policy coordination. As island nations, Japan and the CARICOM countries share a common vulnerability to natural disasters. They have been global partners which have been working together to solve global issues such as environment, disaster prevention, and climate change, as well as issues of the international community based on shared values and principles such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. The year 2024 marks the 30th anniversary since the first Japan-CARICOM Consultation, as well as the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, respectively. The Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024 is an initiative implemented to commemorate these anniversaries.

Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024

As part of the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024, the second such anniversary initiative, following one in 2014, various commemorative events were held in Japan and CARICOM countries to deepen bilateral exchanges.

In Japan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a reception in February 2024 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Jamaica. In March, Dr. Carla Natalie BARNETT, Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community, was invited to visit Japan and attend the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year Reception hosted by the then-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan KAMIKAWA Yoko. The event was also attended by officials from the Caribbean region and Latin American countries in Japan, as well as young diplomats and government officials invited through "Juntos!! Japan-Latin America and the Caribbean Exchange Program."[2] It succeeded in deepening exchanges among a wide range of people from different generations. At the Children's Kasumigaseki Tour Day organized in Tokyo in August 2024, an event entitled, "Let's Get to Know the Countries of the Caribbean, a Region Both Far and Near," was held to introduce children to the attractions of the Caribbean countries and their similarities to Japan in an easy-to-understand manner. In addition, many other events were held throughout Japan to screen Caribbean films and showcase the music, cuisine, and culture of Caribbean countries.

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The official logo of the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024

As for initiatives conducted in the CARICOM countries, in January 2024, a Japanese Ambassador's Cup, Karate Tournament was held in Jamaica, and the Embassy of Japan in the Bahamas hosted an anime screening and offered calligraphy, origami, and other cultural experiences. In February and March 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan hosted lectures on Japanese animation production techniques in Belize, Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. A number of other events to showcase Japanese culture have been organized by the Embassies of Japan in the CARICOM countries at the local level.

Commemorative photo at the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024 Reception held in March 2024 at the Iikura Guest House of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Minato City, Tokyo)

Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The co-chairs of the Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference, IWAYA Takeshi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan (right), and Dr.Vince Henderson, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade and Energy of the Commonwealth of Dominica. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chiyoda City, Tokyo)

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

At the Children's Kasumigaseki Tour Day held in August 2024, visitors enjoyed a performance of Reggae Bon, a fusion of reggae, which is part of the Caribbean culture, and the traditional Japanese Bon dance. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chiyoda City, Tokyo)

Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference

The 8th Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference and related events were held in Tokyo from December 12 to 14, 2024, with a reception hosted by Foreign Minister IWAYA Takeshi on the evening of December 12. Minister IWAYA and Dr. Vince Henderson, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade and Energy of the Commonwealth of Dominica, who co-chaired the conference, delivered remarks expressing their expectations for the outcome of the conference.

At the meeting on December 14, Japan and CARICOM countries reaffirmed their commitment to continue cooperation under the "Three Pillars of Japan's CARICOM Policy"[3]. At the same time, they confirmed that they will work closely together to realize shared goals in today's challenges of the international community, such as maintaining international order in the increasingly severe international situation and resolving global issues, including climate change. These outcomes were also issued in the form of Ministerial Joint Statement. Details can be found on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan at "The 8th Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference, Working Lunch, Signing Ceremony and Joint Press Announcement" (https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_00839.html).

Minister for Foreign Affairs IWAYA (left) and Elizabeth Solomon, Assistant Secretary General, Foreign and Community Relations, CARICOM Secretariat, offered a toast at the Reception for the Eighth Japan-CARICOM Ministerial-Level Conference. (Iikura Guest House of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minato City, Tokyo)

Photo: IMAMURA Keiko

1. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was established as a regional organization in 1973 by Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Guyana. It is composed of small island nations in the Caribbean Sea. Its current members are the 14 states of Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the British Overseas Territory of Montserrat. (Country names are abbreviated.) See website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/latin/caricom/index.html)
2. "Juntos" means "together" in Spanish. This program is for young people in Latin American countries who are expected to contribute to the strengthening of relations with Japan in various fields. It is implemented with the objective of increasing understanding of and interest in Japan, and thereby discovering and nurturing people who are both pro-Japanese and knowledgeable about Japan.
3. The three pillars of Japan's CARICOM policy, as stated by then-Prime Minister ABE Shinzo in 2014 are as follows: (1) cooperation for sustainable development, including overcoming the vulnerabilities particular to small island states; (2) deepening and expanding fraternal bonds of cooperation and friendship; and (3) cooperation for addressing challenges of the international community.