

Venezuela National Day

Music fosters youth spirituality, healing

Seiko Ishikawa
AMBASSADOR OF VENEZUELA

On the happy occasion of the 205th Anniversary of the Independence of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I am honored to extend my best wishes of happiness, health and prosperity to their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Japanese government and its people. I would also like to express, on behalf of our government and myself, felicitations to the Venezuelan community residing in Japan,



along with our well wishes. On this auspicious day, I am grateful to The Japan Times for this opportunity to address its distinguished readers and to convey to the people of Japan and its government the renewed commitment of our government for the continued friendship between Venezuela and Japan.

On this joyful occasion, I would like to share a remarkable and extraordinary event celebrated by those working to build bridges between Venezuela and Japan.

Last March, during the commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit the Tohoku region, members of the Soma Children's Orchestra from Fukushima

Prefecture traveled to Germany to perform abroad for the first time, with one of the top orchestras in the world, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. This episode might have been unremarkable (after all, Japan boasts one of the world's highest numbers of orchestras and ensembles) were it not for the fact that these children from Soma started playing just four years ago.

In 2011, during a charity tour by the members of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra to the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, they recommended the much-acclaimed Venezuelan El Sistema music education model for the post-disaster spiritual recovery of the children of the region.

Thus, Friends of El Sistema Japan was established in 2012, under the able leadership of its CEO, Yutaka Kikugawa, a former UNICEF official, thanks to the strong backing of the city of Soma and to countless supporters from around the globe, including Venezuela. The Soma Children's Orchestra & Choir was launched as the first El Sistema-inspired project in Japan, followed by the Otsuchi Children's Orchestra in Iwate Prefecture in 2014, providing much needed encouragement to the children and communities of both regions.

El Sistema (The National System of Youth and Children's Orchestra and Choirs of Venezuela and designated as a UNICEF Goodwill Am-

bassador) is a music education and social program started by the vision of economist and musician Jose Antonio Abreu in Caracas over four decades ago, providing free access to top-quality music education and transforming the lives of so many. Nowadays, there are more than 1,680 children and youth orchestras in Venezuela, bringing over 787,000 children and youths, out of a population of 30 million, to the study of classical music, where the socially vulnerable account for more than 75 percent of its members. Although El Sistema has been a state-sponsored program all along, since 2012 it has come under the tutelage of the Venezuelan President's Office and,

with its support, El Sistema has started to introduce its music program to the entire national public school system. By the year 2019, it plans to reach more than 1 million children. While in many countries around the globe art programs have been reduced due to fiscal consolidation, Venezuela continues to provide ever-expanding opportunities to every child, regardless of their social and economic status and in spite of difficult economic conditions.

The social impact of the model has proved so successful that its reach has expanded worldwide, with El Sistema-inspired programs established in over 70 countries. After a thorough study and survey of

the impact of El Sistema by the Inter-American Development Bank, they concluded that every dollar invested in the program was providing \$1.68 in social benefits. Therefore, it is no surprise that conductor Simon Rattle has called El Sistema "the most important thing happening in classical music anywhere in the world."

Twenty-five years have passed since the first visit to Japan by the most-representative El Sistema orchestra, the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra. That visit marked the start of a long list of Venezuelan ensembles and orchestras fostering ever-broader relations with Japan. Since the start of the Soma Children's Orchestra and Choir in 2012, every single Japan tour by an El Sistema troupe includes a range of workshops and performances in Soma, allowing greater exchanges between the youth of both countries, but most especially sowing

the seeds of compassion, solidarity and understanding in the hearts of Venezuelans and Japanese alike.

During these uncertain times, with so many conflicts brewing due to hatred, social and economic inequalities, and lack of empathy, there is need for greater understanding and solidarity among all. These can be achieved through music and orchestral education, enhancing the collective values and skills to become a fulfilled member of society, namely cooperation, teamwork, mutual understanding, shared goals and aspirations, self-discipline and, most importantly, a beautiful heart. "The orchestras and choirs are more than artistic structures," Maestro Abreu once said. "They are schools of social life."

Venezuela will continue to play its part and contribute to a fairer world with long-lasting peace for all.



Members of the Teresa Carreno Youth Orchestra of Venezuela and the Soma Children's Orchestra mingle after a workshop in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, in November, 2015. YOUTH ORCHESTRA OF VENEZUELA AND SOMA CHILDREN'S ORCHESTRA



The Soma Children's Orchestra with members of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in Berlin in March. FESJ/2016/MARIKO TAGASHIRA

Development built on friendship

Toshihiro Nikai
CHAIRMAN OF THE JAPAN-VENEZUELA FRIENDSHIP COUNCIL

As chairman of the Japan-Venezuela Friendship Council, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, H.E. Nicolas Maduro, his government and the friendly people of Venezuela on the occasion of the 205th anniversary of the country's independence.



We welcome the efforts of the president in the implementation of the Bolivarian Economic Agenda to boost the national economy through the construction of a new model of cooperation in the productive economy sector. This agenda, which includes the development of 14 strategic engines of the oil and petrochemical, agriculture, mining, information communications technology, construction, military industry, tourism, forestry, communal and socialist economy, banking and finance, exports and new sources of foreign exchange sectors, aims to diversify the production apparatus and address the conditions the country is facing due to falling oil prices.

I am confident Japan and Venezuela will continue to work together in exploring new development projects based on friendship, complementarity of the two economies and mutual benefit as a reflection of our longstanding relationship.

A promising market in key locale

Yorihiko Kojima
CHAIR, JAPAN-VENEZUELA
ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, KEIDANREN

On behalf of the Japan-Venezuela Economic Committee of Keidanren, I would like to convey my heartfelt congratulations to H.E. President Nicolas Maduro and the people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on the 205th anniversary of independence.

Venezuela and Japan have been building close economic relations for many years. Boasting some of the largest crude oil reserves in the world, Venezuela also has other abundant natural resources such as natural gas and iron ore. For Japan, Venezuela is an important country in terms of diversification

of resources.

Moreover, Venezuela is a promising consumer market with a population of 30 million. I hope the business environment in Venezuela continues to improve, thereby contributing to further deepening business ties between the two countries.

Additionally, we have observed an increasingly wide range of long-standing cultural exchanges, which include the world-renowned El Sistema youth orchestra's Japan tour and the annual Venezuelan Cultural Week in Japan.

Finally, I sincerely wish the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and its people peace and prosperity on the anniversary of independence. The Japan-Venezuela Economic Committee will continue to do its best to enhance economic relations between the two nations and help contribute to a mutually beneficial future.

Bilateral ties continue to strengthen

Masateru Ito
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-VENEZUELA
ASSOCIATION

On behalf of the Japan-Venezuela Association, I extend my sincere congratulations to the government and people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on the occasion of the 205th anniversary of the country's independence.

Japan and Venezuela maintain a traditionally friendly relationship and the cultural exchanges between both coun-

tries have been increasingly active. In recent years the Cultural Week of Japan in Venezuela has been held annually in the cities of Caracas, Merida and Valencia, and in April, in the city of Maracay for the first time. It is also worth mentioning that four students, members of the University of Tokyo's Venezuelan band, Estudiantina de Komaba, visited Venezuela for three weeks to practice and interact with Venezuelan professional and amateur musicians.

At the same time, activities to present the Venezuelan culture and arts to Japanese people are also energetically planned for this year. These include an opera later this month, recitals of Venezuelan singer Cecilia

Todd and her group in August, a gastronomic salon in September, a Japan tour by Maracucho Group GUACO in October, a concert by Cheo Hurtado and his ensemble in November and more.

Japan and Venezuela are deepening their bilateral cooperation not only in the cultural and artistic areas, but also in intellectual exchanges and other fields. Every year five or six Venezuelan students are invited to study and conduct research at Japanese universities. Similarly, Japanese citizens participate in activities in Venezuela in various areas, including agriculture, forestry, the environment, health, education and sports, as well as plan-

ning and administration under the Japan International Cooperation Agency's volunteer programs. Through mutual efforts, the two nations have expanded the scope of mutual understanding and have developed much closer relations with each other.

The Japan-Venezuela Association has been making efforts over the last 13 years to promote goodwill and friendship between the citizens of our two nations. I would like to reiterate our warmest felicitations on this historic day, and assure all our Venezuelan friends that the Japan-Venezuela Association will continue to contribute to the strengthening of our bilateral relationship.

Solid relationships across a broad range of sectors

Takeo Hiranuma
CHAIRMAN OF THE JAPAN-
VENEZUELA PARLIAMENTARY
FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE

Venezuela marks today the 205th Anniversary of the Proclamation of its Independence and I would like to express my deepest congratulations to the President of the Bolivari-

an Republic of Venezuela, H.E. Nicolas Maduro, his government and the Venezuelan people on this remarkable date that commemorates becoming an independent and sovereign country.

Venezuela and Japan have been promoting good relations in different fields, especially in the energy field, that have been expanded to other important sectors such as technology, infrastructure, education, the environment and sports since establishing diplomatic relations 78 years

ago. On this significant day, celebrating Venezuelan Independence, I wish to convey on behalf of my country and myself, our joy in sharing common ground on many bilateral and multilateral issues based on the friendship and mutual respect among the two governments and our peoples. This year Japan and Venezuela are part of the U.N. Security Council as non-permanent members. The development of our nations has been driven by similar

values and a belief in individual liberties, fundamental civil rights such as freedom of speech and expression, and a right to self-determination.

As Chairman of the Japan-Venezuela Parliamentary Friendship League, I vow to deepen and continue to strengthen the close and friendly relations between Venezuela and Japan, through the promotion of bilateral cooperation and mutual trust for the benefit of our countries.

Congratulations

to the People of the Bolivarian
Republic of Venezuela
on the Occasion of
the 205th Anniversary
of Their Independence

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