

Venezuela independence day

Venezuela well on the road to prosperity

Seiko Ishikawa
AMBASSADOR OF VENEZUELA TO JAPAN

On the occasion of the 198th anniversary of our independence, on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, its government and people, I am honored to convey our renewed commitment to the continued friendship between Venezuela and Japan and to extend my best wishes of happiness, health and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, to the Japanese government and its people. On this auspicious day, I would like to express our appreciation to The Japan Times for this opportunity to address its distinguished readers.



Next year, Venezuelans will celebrate the 200th anniversary since the beginning of our independence revolution and, in 2011, two centuries since the final declaration of independence. The soil plowed by our founding fathers has finally given way to a prosperous future. Last December, the Bolivarian Government of President Chavez celebrated 10 years of achievements, improving the quality of life of millions of Venezuelans, exceeding expectations, and realizing the dreams of many: to achieve a just and humane society.

During the Administration of President Chavez, the extreme poverty rate significantly fell from 42 percent in 1998 to 9.5 percent. General poverty also fell significantly, from 50.5 percent in 1998 to 33.4 percent in 2008. Venezuela's Human Development Index



President Hugo Chavez Frias

(HDI) increased from 0.69 (medium development) in 1998 to 0.84 (high development) in 2008.

In education, we have

achieved greater access to basic, medium and higher schools, and we are currently investing more than 7 percent of GDP in education, while in 1998 it was only 3.9 percent. Our social programs have increased the presence of primary health care physicians from 1,628 in 1998 to more than 20,000 in 2008, through 1,600 community consultation centers all over the country. The subsidized food program has benefited more than 40 percent of the population.

The social programs' effectiveness has made them highly popular throughout Venezuela — the educational missions are viewed positively by 76 percent of Venezuelans and the health missions by 72 percent. These 10 years of achievements of the Venezuelan Government have been accomplished within a democratic system with the active participation of its citizens. The 2008 report by Latinobarometro, a Chilean polling firm that conducts a highly respected annual public survey on important issues in Latin America, showed these results for Venezuela:

- Asked about the most effective way to bring about change, Venezuelans overwhelmingly replied through elections. Eighty percent of Venezuelans expressed a faith in elections while only 9 percent of those polled believed that participating in protests was more effective.

- Venezuelans continue to be among the most satisfied with the democratic system in their country, second only to Uruguay. This year's level of satisfaction is 14 percent higher than the number reported in 1998.

- Asked whether democracy guarantees freedom of expression to all in all occasions,

60 percent of Venezuelans replied affirmatively.

- Asked about social inequalities in a democracy, Venezuelans ranked highest in the region with 36 percent, believing that social inequality had diminished and the lowest in the region (37 percent) believing that inequality remained the same. On average, only 21 percent of the region believes that social inequalities are being addressed by democracy.

- Venezuelans reported the highest levels of support for democracy with 85 percent. The next highest level of support for democracy was found in Uruguay with 79 percent; Venezuela was well above the regional average of 57 percent.

- Eighty-five percent of Venezuelans agreed that democracy is necessary for development.

One of the many consequences of the recent economic crisis has been the decline of oil prices, affecting the 2009 National Budget, calculated at \$60 a barrel, requiring necessary adjustments. Even so, the economic measures taken by the government to protect Venezuela from the global turmoil have not placed any burden on the people and, on the contrary, funding for important social programs will continue. Sound economic and fiscal policies have led to the creation of development fund mechanisms that are the source of social and economic development of the country, with investment plans in non-oil projects related to infrastructure, agriculture, basic and medium industry and mining, amounting to \$100 billion up until 2013.

Last year marked the celebration of 70 years of friendly and fruitful bilateral relations with Japan, based on a strong

Chavez visit strengthened ties

Takeo Hiranuma
CHIRMAN, JAPAN-VENEZUELAN
PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE

On behalf of the Japan-Venezuelan Parliamentary Friendship League, I would like to convey my heartfelt congratulations to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and its people on the occasion of the 198th anniversary of its independence.

The common destiny of Venezuela and Japan is founded on a productive, intense, solid and mutually beneficial bilateral relationship that began 71 years ago. It is in constant evolution, reflecting a



long-standing friendly tradition.

A new face of Venezuela-Japan bilateral relations began with the recent visit of President Hugo Chavez to Japan, characterized by an integral joint vision, where binational interests, cooperation, and interchange are strengthened, transformed and expanded under a complementary criteria.

On this special day of celebration for the people of Venezuela, I would like to point out that we share fundamental values that provide clear paths toward understanding, peace and prosperity.

Japan and Venezuela believe in achieving international peace and cooperation by promoting integral human security. They share a special

sensitivity to economic, environmental, energy and social issues, and have made substantial efforts toward the peaceful use of nuclear energy and the abolition of all nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, we admire the great zeal with which the Venezuelan government has been working under the leadership of President Chavez to build a fairer society.

The Japan-Venezuela Parliamentary Friendship League is determined to deepen the close relationship between the two nations, promoting an open political and economic dialogue. I am convinced that there are multiple and wide-ranging opportunities that we shall explore, transit and make effective.

Energy deal an epoch-making event

Yorihiko Kojima
CHAIRMAN, JAPAN-VENEZUELA ECONOMIC
COMMITTEE, NIPPON KEIDANREN

On behalf of the Japan-Venezuela Economic Committee of Nippon Keidanren (the Japan Business Federation), I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to H. E. President Hugo Chavez and the people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on their 198th anniversary of independence.

In 2008, Venezuela and Japan celebrated the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between our two countries, and also

the 80th anniversary of Japanese emigration to Venezuela. I regard these anniversaries as proof of the continuous strengthening of the friendship between us.

In April this year, we had the great pleasure of welcoming President Chavez to Japan. Many Japanese in the public and private sectors were interested in his meeting with Prime Minister Taro Aso. More than 70 people from the business community gathered at Keidanren headquarters to hear President Chavez speak. These facts have reassured us of the business opportunities with Venezuela, and we trust that the mutual business environment will stabilize further from hereon and allow us to realize these opportunities.

One epoch-making event took place this year. The memorandum on Venezuela-Japan comprehensive energy cooperation was signed in March. To put this into action, in April, President Chavez and Prime Minister Aso agreed on organizing working groups. This is a brilliant example of how the two governments can collaborate and consequently boost our economic ties.

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



The keys: Morrocoy National Park features a large number of small islands. VENEZUELAN EMBASSY

Congratulations

to the People of
the Bolivarian Republic of
Venezuela on Their 198th
Independence Day



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on the Occasion of
Their 198th Independence Day



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Visit Venezuela: a Caribbean, Andean and Amazonian paradise

Come to Venezuela and enjoy in just one country the magic of the sunny Caribbean Sea, the Spanish colonial heritage of the Andean region and the "Lost World of El Dorado" in the Canaima National Park of the Amazon region.

The Caribbean Sea

Isla Margarita is the largest and most beautiful of Venezuela's Caribbean islands. Also known as the "Pearl of the Caribbean," it is a picturesque destination for a relaxing beach vacation, where you will find an up-to-date transport infrastructure, modern shopping malls, casinos, exciting night life, excellent hotels, castles, churches, museums and numerous beaches, all offering different facilities and attractions such as Playa El Yaque, one the most famous windsurfing and kite surfing beaches in the world.

The Andes

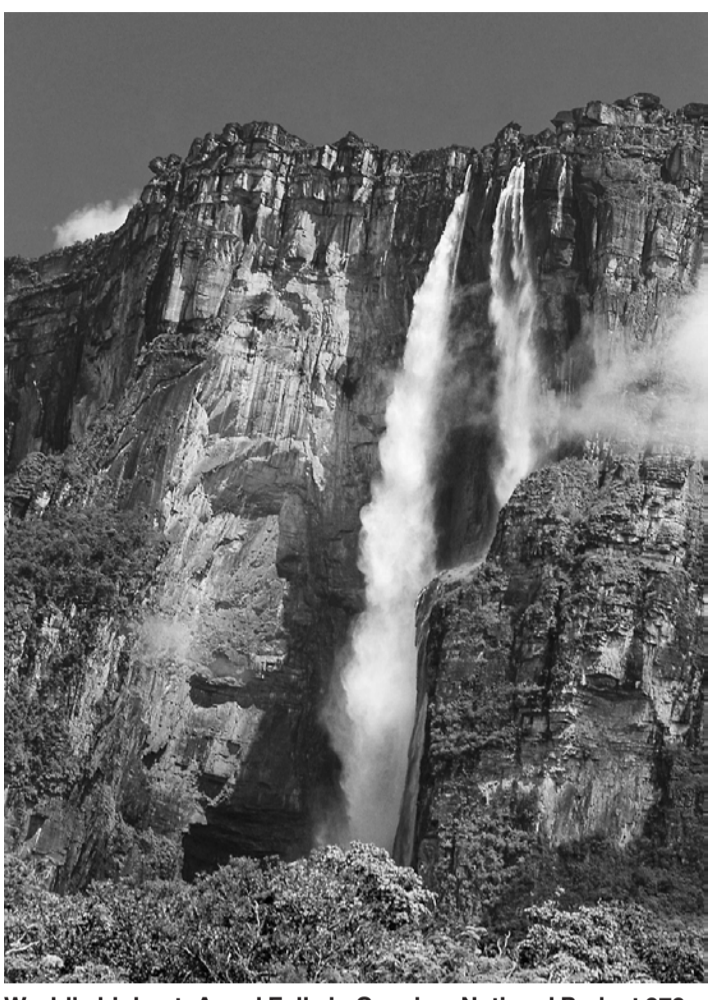
Merida is one the most beloved destinations for local tourism. With impressive biodiversity and a soothingly mild climate, Merida is also known for its exquisite flora and fauna, and its population of wild birds, including the Giant Andes Condor.

Visitors can take advantage of the various hikes and treks in the Andes. The Merida cable car, the highest in the world, can take you to the highest point in Venezuela, the Pico Bolivar, at 5,008 meters above sea level.

The Amazon

Jules Verne called it the "Mighty Orinoco" in his 1898 science-fiction novel of the same name. The Orinoco River is located in the center of the country and could be the place to start a wonderful trip to the south, or the Amazon region, and the unforgettable Canaima National Park, which stretches for over 3 million hectares along the border with Brazil and Guyana. Here you will see the amazing table ("tepui") mountain formations, such as Monte Roraima (2,772 meters), the highest and easiest to climb, and Auyantepui, from which the Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world (1,000 meters), tumble.

The rich and varied ethnic content of Venezuelan culture, which is the result of the fusion between Europeans, people of



World's highest: Angel Falls in Canaima National Park at 979 meters are 16 times the height of Niagara Falls and have an uninterrupted drop of 807 meters.

African descent and the original indigenous inhabitants, is reflected in the country's happy and friendly people, beautiful women and the tasty food that combines the essences of those cultures, with even a few Asian touches. Among the excellent local specialties are "pabellon criollo" (a dish consisting of black beans, rice, shredded meat and fried plantain), "cachapas" (a round, thin bread made of ground maize with delicious white local cheese inside) and the traditional "arepas" (indigenous bread made of maize, which is often filled with cheese, meat, ham or butter, or simply eaten as it is).

Flora and fauna

Venezuela lies within the neotropic ecological zone. Large portions of the country were originally covered by moist broadleaf forests. One of 17 megadiverse countries and among the top 20 countries in the world in terms of endemism, some 38 percent of



Looking for dinner: The caracara, a bird of prey.

more than 21,000 plant species are unique to the country; 23 percent of reptilian and 50 percent of amphibian species are also endemic.

Venezuela has significant biodiversity across habitats ranging from desertlike scrublands in the extreme northwest to coastal mangrove forests in the northeast. Venezuela also is home to 1,417 bird species, 48 of which are endemic.

Cooperation building in all fields

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 198th anniversary of the country's independence.



Since the celebration last year of the 80th anniversary of Japanese emigration to Venezuela as well as the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, there has been growing momentum by Japan and Venezuela to strengthen the bilateral relations further.

In April this year, the president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez Frias, paid a very successful working visit to Japan, and initiated a new

stage in the bilateral relationship between Japan and Venezuela. In the course of the visit, the two countries agreed to promote further cooperation in the energy sector, especially in the development of the Orinoco oil field and gas exploitation, and establish a working team to explore ways to ensure its materialization.

Our future relations look promising when we consider that Japan and Venezuela have enormous potential to expand the mutually complementary economic relations supported by Venezuela's rich energy and mineral resources, and Japanese technology and capital. It is also encouraging that the mutual cooperation will promote tourism between the two countries.

Apart from the economic area, Japan and Venezuela also deepened their bilateral cooperation in the areas of cultural, artistic and intellectual exchanges as well. In December last year, the world-famous Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra, acclaimed as one of today's most vigorous and vibrant symphony orchestras, performed in Tokyo

and Hiroshima, and fascinated many classical music fans in Japan.

Recently, we have seen growing academic cooperation between universities of both countries as well as an increase in Japan studies at Venezuelan universities. Contrary to the general image of Venezuela held by the Japanese, Venezuelans have a very strong interest in Japanese culture, and there are many institutions and associations in Venezuela that promote Japanese culture to Venezuelans.

It is indeed a pleasure to see that there is better understanding between the two nations, and also through the efforts on both sides to hold "Cultural Festival of Venezuela in Japan" and "Cultural Festival of Japan in Venezuela," the two nations are now closer to each other.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our warmest felicitations on this historic day and to assure all our Venezuelan friends that the Japan-Venezuela Association will continue to contribute to the strengthening of our bilateral relationship.

Nation on the road to prosperity

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and stable economic exchange encompassing trade, investment, cooperation and the growing links among its governments and people.

Last April, President Chavez paid a visit to Japan, marking the beginning of a new economic alliance based on common interests and harnessing the opportunities that arise with the complementari-

ty of both economies, transforming the bilateral relationship into an association of global dimensions.

During the presidential visit, 12 strategic energy cooperation agreements were signed between Venezuela and Japan, encompassing project financing and Japanese companies' participation in the oil, gas and petrochemical sectors. These agreements fol-

lowed the energy cooperation accord signed by the Minister of Energy and Oil of Venezuela, Mr. Rafael Ramirez, and the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan, Mr. Toshihiro Nikai, in March this year. As part of the bilateral commitments, both countries are enthusiastically implementing these cooperation projects, cementing the ever growing relationship.