

Venezuela national day

Continuing to strengthen our ties

Seiko Ishikawa
AMBASSADOR OF VENEZUELA

On the occasion of the 201st anniversary of the independence of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of our 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.

Venezuela has made remarkable improvements to the quality of life of its citizens, including significant reductions in poverty, inequality, exclusion and unemployment, through more than two dozen state-funded programs called "social missions." According to the National

Institute of Statistics, the government's total social investment over the last 12 years is equivalent to \$772 billion. These programs are designed to address the basic needs of the population, providing free access to services in areas such as health, nutrition, education, housing and job training.

In 2011, five new "great social missions" were launched to extend the success of previous programs and achieve specific objectives regarding health, employment, housing, social security and agriculture. Among them, the Great Housing Mission (Gran Misión Vivienda, in Spanish) has been designed to respond to the shortage of adequate housing in Venezuela by providing affordable homes to underprivileged families, with the aim to build 2 million houses in the next seven years. This mission was launched in April 2011, shortly after the worst rains in 40 years hit Venezuela, causing flooding that left 130,000 people homeless. These refugees were among the first beneficiaries of the new housing mission and indigenous communities, many times located in some of

the most vulnerable areas, were taken into consideration. By late June, some 213,609 housing units have been provided through this social program.

In addition to helping vulnerable populations, the Housing Mission has also contributed to the expansion of the construction sector, which grew 29.6 percent in the first quarter of 2012, growth for three straight quarters and has given a boost to Venezuela's production and services sector.

According to a recent study by ECLAC (U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), Venezuela's economy will grow 5 percent in 2012, a projection much higher than the expected average for Latin America at 3.7 percent. This reflects the positive behavior as evidenced by the growth of added value during the first quarter of 2012 in the following sectors: financial institutions (27.7 percent), transport and storage (8.5 percent), trade (7.9 percent), communications (7.0 percent), community services (6.6 percent), public services (4.6 percent), electricity and water (3.7 percent), business services

(3.7 percent). From the institutional point of view, we should note the rapid growth of the private sector, whose gross added value expanded by 6.0 percent. This tendency has become widespread in most of the activities that comprise this sector.

In recent years, the traditionally friendly ties between Venezuela and Japan have been fostered through various political, business and cultural exchanges. One such example is the recent visit to Venezuela (November 2011) by a delegation of Japanese parliamentarians headed by Toshihiro Nikai, former minister of economy, trade and industry, to exchange views with Venezuelan authorities for further bilateral cooperation, especially infrastructure projects. On this occasion, we concluded the signing of a sports cooperation agreement between the Nippon Sport Science University (NSSU) and the Venezuelan University for Sports. Thanks to this initiative and to the generous support of Kenshiro Matsunami, chairman of the NSSU Group, the first batch of Venezuelan athletes arrived in Japan to study at its various educational centers.

Another significant development is the visit to Tokyo of the Venezuelan Minister for Energy and Mining Rafael Ramirez, in April 2012, for a bilateral meeting with Yukio Edano, minister of economy, trade and industry. On this occasion, financial agreements totaling \$1 billion were signed for the expansion of a refinery and for the acquisition of oil sector goods and services. State-backed Japan Oil, Gas and Metal National Corp. (JOGMEC) also renewed an agreement with the Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA to further expand the cooperation in oil development technology.

On Oct. 7, Venezuelans will exercise their political right through secret, direct and universal voting for presidential elections. The National Electoral Council, an independent branch of the state, is responsible for overseeing these elections, for guaranteeing the transparency and ensuring popular participation. Venezuela's elections are among the most transparent and most technologically advanced in the world, and, as a result, voter turnout is extremely high, with 75 percent in the last presidential elections.



Majestic peaks: Pico Bolivar, the highest mountain in Venezuela at 4,981 meters, is named after the Venezuelan independence hero Simon Bolivar. EMBASSY OF VENEZUELA

For the last 12 years, all major electoral processes in Venezuela have been audited and declared free and fair by institutions such as the Carter Center, the Organization of American States and the European Union. This process will reflect once again the democratic values of the Venezuelan society at large.

Following the devastation from the triple disaster last year,

Venezuelans will continue to provide its support and encouragement to the affected people of the Tohoku region, based on the mutual friendship and solidarity between Venezuela and Japan. I am pleased to announce the start of a collaboration project between a newly created association, Friends of El Sistema Japan, and the city of Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, based

on the successful and world-renowned Venezuelan model of music education, El Sistema. We will be happy if it may provide to the children of Soma the inspiration and hope that thousands of Venezuelan children and youths have enjoyed through this fascinating program and, in doing so, we can continue to strengthen our bilateral ties and relationship even more.



Cultural ties: Venezuelan Ambassador Seiko Ishikawa (right) and Hidekiyo Tachiya (second from left), mayor of Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, attend the signing ceremony between the city and the Friends of El Sistema Japan, in Soma City Hall on May 7. FRIENDS OF EL SISTEMA JAPAN

El Sistema gives children an opportunity with free music education

The classical music world has been revitalized by El Sistema: thousands flock to each concert and even rehearsals are sought after, as if the musicians were famous celebrities.

The interest shown by audiences in every country they have visited is astronomical. And the truth is that the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra, the Teresa Carreño Youth Orchestra and the Caracas Symphony Youth Orchestra, among many others, are not like any other youth orchestras; they are direct descendants of El Sistema method of learning music, implemented by the vi-

sionary Dr. Jose Antonio Abreu, who started out with 11 youths in his garage in Caracas some 37 years ago.

This system, El Sistema, is a state-funded free music education program, open to children and youngsters, sometimes in unfavorable environments. It initiates them in musical training to form choirs and orchestras, and provides a definite change for many youngsters facing a lack of opportunities as an alternative to poverty, boredom and crime.

Their lives are not the only ones that change. Their families, friends and whole communities

are changed, too. It raises the level of self-esteem for everyone, and this translates into better students and better citizens. Solidarity, respect, and teamwork are some values that are inculcated deeply into each participant. They become an important part of a bigger family that nurtures them in every aspect of their daily experience. They acquire a great sense of belonging, spiritual wealth and performing excellence.

Their professionalism is legendary. Many have moved on to occupy important posts in world class orchestras. Gustavo Du-

damel, music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, is one of the most outstanding conductors developed by El Sistema, but Diego Matheuz (invited to the 2011 Saito Kinen Festival), Dietrich Paredes (Central American Youth Orchestra) and Christian Vasquez (Caracas Symphony Youth Orchestra), are close runners-up.

In recent years, the support of President Hugo Chavez's government has potentiated this system and it has sprung in other nations, in areas that need special attention. El Sistema has received many awards, includ-

ing the UNESCO International Music Award, for its methods of social inclusion and community

development, making our world a better place. El Sistema has

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The Simon Bolivar String Quartet
2012 Japan tour schedule

Oct. 13: Toyohashi Shimin Bunka Kaikan Hall, Aichi Pref.
Oct. 15: Komagane Kogen Art Museum, Nagano Pref.
Oct. 17: Kioi Hall, Tokyo
Oct. 20: Kamakura Geijutsukan Hall, Kanagawa Pref.
Oct. 21: Okazaki City Civic Center, Aichi Pref.
Oct. 22: Sunshine Hall, Awaji Island, Hyogo Pref.
Oct. 24: Sugar Hall, Nanjo, Okinawa Pref.
For more information, visit www.venezuela.or.jp.

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to the People of
the Bolivarian Republic of
Venezuela on Their 201st
Independence Day

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El Sistema music education comes to Japan

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created more than 250 regional choirs and orchestras; it actually boasts a 400,000 musician strong force in Venezuela.

This method of social inclusion through music has already

begun in: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, England, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Italy, Jamaica, South Korea, Mexico,

Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Scotland, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States and Uruguay.

Japan is next with El Sistema in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. The newly created Friends of El

Sistema Japan is rapidly moving, alongside the regional government, in starting El Sistema-inspired classes for children affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake in Tohoku. This will contribute to the recovery of all involved, especially the young children and developing youths.

Next year, the English language manual Unicorn for Japanese high school students will refer to El Sistema and Venezuela. This is a great achievement in promoting this system of music education and social inclusion.

This October, the renowned Simon Bolivar String Quartet, all members of which are from El Sistema, will tour Japan (see box on previous page for schedule). Next year, the Caracas Symphony Youth Orchestra will tour Japan. From July 19 to 22, their musical director, Christian Vasquez, will conduct the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra.

Please join the wonderful world of El Sistema. Maestro Abreu's advice to all in El Sistema is: Work hard and dream big. It's like saying, "ganbatte!"



Music education: The Simon Bolivar Symphony Orchestra conducted by Gustavo Dudamel performs in Tokyo in December 2008. EMBASSY OF VENEZUELA

Progress in energy cooperation

Masateru Ito
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-VENEZUELA
SOCIETY

On behalf of the Japan-Venezuela Society, I extend my sincere congratulations to the government and people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on the occasion of the 201st anniversary of the country's independence.



Japan and Venezuela maintain a traditionally friendly relationship and it is encouraging that there has been progress in the area of energy cooperation as shown by the visit by Toshihiro Nikai, a Diet member, and his delegation to Venezuela in November last year to exchange views with Rafael Ramirez, the minister of energy and petroleum and president of Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), and the visit by Minister Ramirez to Japan in April this year. During his visit, Minister Ramirez met with Yukio Edano, minister of economy, trade and industry, and attended the fourth meet-

ing of the Japan-Venezuela energy cooperation working groups.

It is gratifying as well that in June last year a financial agreement, amounting to \$1.5 billion, was concluded between the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and PDVSA for the expansion of oil refineries in El Palito and Puerto la Cruz, and through the financing 2 million barrels of Venezuelan crude oil was exported to Japan.

Apart from the economic area, Japan and Venezuela deepened their bilateral cooperation in the areas of cultural, artistic and intellectual exchanges as well. It is indeed a pleasure to see that there is better understanding between the two nations, and through the efforts on both sides, the two nations are 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 Society will continue to contribute to the strengthening of our bilateral relationship.

Both nations remain determined to deepen close bilateral relationship

Takeo Hiranuma
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-VENEZUELA PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE



On behalf of the Japan-Venezuela Parliamentary Friendship League, I would like to convey my heartfelt congratulations to the government and people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on the happy occasion of the 201st anniversary of their independence.

I would also like to express my satisfaction for the positive development of the bilateral ties between Japan and Venezuela as a reflection of our long-standing friendship. We have diversified and expanded our cooperation at the highest level of government and business, deepening and broadening the exchanges through the development of projects of high value.

In this very special day of celebration for the government and people of Venezuela, I would like to highlight that we share common fundamental values that provide clear paths toward peace and prosperity. Japan and Venezuela promote international understanding, peace and cooperation, and work alongside each other by promoting human rights, social issues, environmental protection, nuclear disarmament and the reform of the U.N. Security Council.

We admire the great zeal by which the Venezuelan government and its people are striving to build a fairer and more humane society.

I am convinced that we will keep expanding multiple and substantial opportunities in the near future. The Japan-Venezuela Parliamentary Friendship League is determined to deepen further the close relationship between both nations, promoting an open political and economic dialogue.

Key agreements help contribute to a mutually beneficial future

Yorihiko Kojima
CHAIRMAN, JAPAN-VENEZUELA
ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, KEIDANREN

On behalf of the Japan-Venezuela Economic Committee of Keidanren (Japan Business Federation), I would like to convey my heartfelt congratulations to H. E. President Hugo Chavez and the people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on their 201st anniversary of independence.

Venezuela and Japan have been enhancing economic re-



lationships, in particular, in natural resources and energy areas. Since Venezuela has an advantage of abundant natural resources, such as crude oil, natural gas and iron ore, cooperation in these areas is expected to be developed further. Japan has also been contributing to better lives for the people of Venezuela by exporting industrial products, including automobiles.

In fact, Venezuela and Japan have been increasing the bilateral relationship in recent years; after signing an energy agreement in 2009, a \$1.5 billion loan was agreed upon in 2011 for the improvement of El Palito and an-

other refinery in the eastern city of Puerto la Cruz.

Also, in April this year, Japan signed a \$1 billion loan agreement with Venezuela's PDVSA (Petroleos de Venezuela S.A.) to further expand its oil refineries in the northern state of Carabobo and for the acquisition of oil sector goods and services. The two countries discussed the further possibility of cooperation in their joint oil-extraction projects in Venezuela's Orinoco Belt, established in 2009 between PDVSA, JOGMEC (Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corp.) and several Japanese firms. Both countries are also working on alternative

energy and the conservation of the environment.

I hope that the two countries will see more successful examples of bilateral cooperation and the potential of our economic relations can be fully realized with further improvement of Venezuela's business climate.

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

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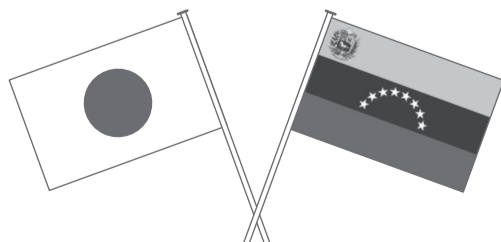
to the People of the Bolivarian
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