

International Criminal Court President Ms. Tomoko Akane Interview

By Karen Nishina



On August 20th, 2024, the International School Network hosted a special lecture and Q&A with Ms. Tomoko AKANE, President of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The event, attended by approximately 20 students, provided a rare opportunity to engage directly with a leading figure in international justice. Ms. AKANE, the first female President of the ICC and a Japanese national, shared her insights on the court's critical mission and the challenges it faces, while also offering a powerful message of encouragement to the next generation of global citizens.



Ms. AKANE began by explaining the fundamental nature of the ICC. The court was established by the Rome Statute, a treaty that officially came into force in 2002. Unlike other international courts, the ICC is not a UN court but a permanent judicial body constituted by the countries that have ratified the Rome Statute. Its primary mission is to end impunity for the "most serious crimes of concern to the international community. As a whole." These core crimes fall into four categories: Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes, and The Crime of Aggression.

Ms. AKANE clarified that the ICC does not handle all international crimes, such as human trafficking or terrorism, unless they are committed as part of a war crime. She

also highlighted the principle of complementarity, which dictates that the ICC does not act as a court superior to national courts. Instead, it serves as a complementary court, stepping in only when national courts are unwilling or unable to genuinely carry out investigations or prosecutions. This is particularly relevant in situations where a country's judicial system has collapsed due to war or internal strife.

She also raised the issue of Japan's limited presence within the ICC itself. With only about 10 Japanese employees among nearly 1,000, she feels the Japanese voice is underrepresented. This lack of diversity, particularly in leadership roles, is something she hopes will change. She encouraged young people to engage with these complex issues and help ensure a future where international law, not the law of the strong, prevails. Her hope is that more Japanese citizens will consider working in international organizations like the ICC, bringing their unique perspectives to the global stage.



On August 18th, 2025, the International School Network visited the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, to meet the President, Ms. Tomoko AKANE. Ms. AKANE described the ICC's ultimate goal as being more than a judicial body. While its immediate function is to "bring justice based on the evidence," she sees its broader mission as setting a positive example for global society. She hopes the court's work will inspire people to seek justice within their own countries and contribute to a more peaceful world. Regarding the court's deterrent effect, she noted that the ICC is working to counter non-cooperation from some states. In addition to public outreach, she personally engages with state officials to explain the court's work. She also highlighted the need for countries like Japan to update their legal systems to prosecute international crimes, which would reinforce the ICC's

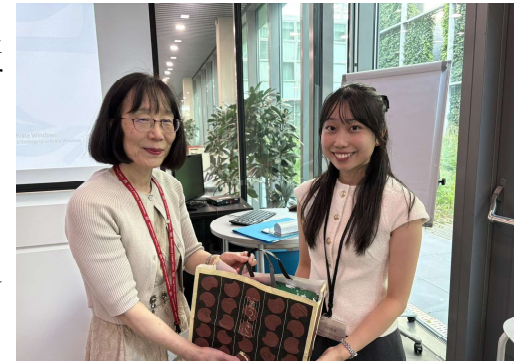
principle of complementarity, in which the court steps in only when national systems are unwilling or unable to act.

When asked about her personal values, Ms. AKANE shared that her time at the ICC has broadened her perspective, teaching her that no single legal system is perfect. She finds encouragement in her colleagues and maintains a sense of optimism even when faced with difficulties.

Her advice for young people is to avoid relying on a single viewpoint. "Read as many as possible, not to choose one direction, but the other directions as well," she advised. She also emphasized the importance of discussing complex issues with friends and mentors, and ultimately, to think for yourself.



Ms. AKANE is currently facing significant challenges, including a recent backlash following the issuance of arrest warrants against leaders involved in conflicts. On August 20, new sanctions were added, bringing the total number of sanctioned individuals to nine, including the top three officials in the Office of the Prosecutor and six judges. This situation is significantly impacting their work and personal lives, forcing the court to scramble to respond. "We are currently in a situation where we're doing everything we can just to survive," Ms. AKANE stated. "But I believe we must not lose hope and see this through to the very end."



Kanagawa International School

Kindergarten Class Age : from 2 years old

Regular Class : Monday to Friday 9:00-14:30

Saturday Kindergarten Class : Saturday 9:00-14:00

Elementary Class Age : 6 to 12 years old

Middle school Class Age : 11 to 15 years old

• **Totsuka School**

3940 Totsuka-cho, Totsuka-ku, Yokohama

• **Fujisawa School**

17-1 Minami-Fujisawa, Fujisawa

www.kischool.com info@kischool.com



Ukraine Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On September 17th, 2024, the International School Network visited the Embassy of Ukraine in Tokyo to interview the Deputy Chief of the Mission, Minister-Counselor, Mr. Oleksandr SEMENIUK.

In the beginning of the interview, Mr. SEMENIUK expressed his appreciation for the friendship. "From the first days of the aggression, we have felt the warmth and prayers of the Japanese people. Despite being 8,000 kilometers away, your support is close to our hearts." In February, Ukraine and Japan signed over 50 documents on practical cooperation. Mr. SEMENIUK mentions Japan's experience with rebuilding after disasters is invaluable. From technology to energy infrastructure, Ukraine welcomes Japanese support and is inspired by it. He also spoke about his love for Japanese culture, especially sushi. Ukraine is one of the top sushi-consuming countries after Japan. He

explains that Ukrainian people deeply admire Japanese food, culture, and way of life. Regarding the International Criminal Court's (ICC) decision, Mr. SEMENIUK emphasizes that Ukraine fully supports the ICC's decision. "It is not just about ending the war. It's about ensuring justice." He emphasizes Ukraine's readiness to cooperate with the ICC in future proceedings.

About Ukraine's recent military advances, Mr. SEMENIUK clearly states that Ukraine has no intention to occupy any foreign territory. Their actions are meant to strengthen its position in peace negotiations, aid prisoner exchanges, and draw Russian forces away from other regions.



When asked whether peace with Russia is possible, Mr. SEMENIUK explains, "We pray for peace, but not peace at any cost. First, we need victory. Restoring our territorial integrity. Then justice, with war criminals held accountable. Only once Russia returns to a peaceful, lawful mode of international

conduct can we consider rebuilding a relationship." He also expresses his opinions on reforms of the United Nations. He encourages reforms starting from the General Assembly, as Russia's veto power blocks real progress in the UN.



Mr. SEMENIUK aspired to become a doctor inspired by his family. However, in high school he became more interested in politics and international relations. He trained at the Institute for International Relations in Ukraine and joined the diplomatic service at 22, and has been a diplomat ever since. In the end of the interview, Mr. SEMENIUK expresses gratitude and resolve. "These two and a half years have been filled with pain, but also with incredible solidarity. We are working every day including weekends and holidays to defend our country. With friends like Japan, we know we are not alone."

Haiti Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On September 5th, 2023, the International School Network visited the Embassy of Haiti in Japan for an interview with Chargé d'Affaires Mr. Watson DENIS.

Mr. DENIS describes the core mission of Haiti's education system as "building the Haitian soul." He explained that for a people with a history marked by colonization and slavery, it is crucial for every Haitian to understand their origins and their identity as a black nation in the world. Education, in this sense, is not just about academic knowledge but about fostering a profound sense of belonging. The national language, Haitian Creole, is a direct creation of the Haitian people, contrasting with French, the language inherited from their colonizers, and stands as a key cultural element that binds the country

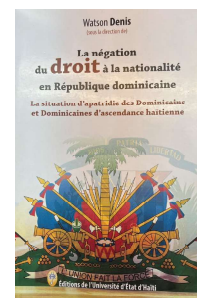
together. Recalling his own journey, Mr. DENIS shared that his early aspirations were to become a Catholic priest or a doctor. However, as he grew older, his intellectual curiosity shifted, leading him to pursue a career as a professor of social science and eventually into the world of international relations and diplomacy. This path, which led him to his current role working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was driven by a desire to learn about other cultures and to serve his nation on a global stage. This journey, he noted, demonstrates that life's path is not always linear, but what matters most is following a passion for learning and a desire to contribute.



Mr. DENIS's vision for world peace is centered on dialogue. He believes that many conflicts and wars arise from a fundamental

lack of communication and that through dialogue, many problems can be solved. He urged people to understand the perspectives of their neighbors, both literally and figuratively.

In his message to the Japanese people and students, he encouraged them to "continue on the same path" of discipline and organization that he found so surprising upon his arrival in Japan. He was particularly struck by the country's high level of infrastructure and modernization. He encouraged Japanese students to study hard and secure influential positions in the world, using their success to benefit others. He also expressed a deep desire for more Japanese people to visit Haiti, to learn about its rich culture and history, rather than relying solely on media portrayals. He has written books and articles, such as one titled "Haiti changes the course of History," that may help foster a deeper understanding and connection between the two nations.



The Republic of the Philippines Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On August 15th, 2024, the International School Network visited the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines in Tokyo to interview Her Excellency Ms. Mylene de Joya GARCIA-ALBANO.

What unites the people is the unique Filipino concept, Bayanihan. Bayanihan is the spirit of communal unity and cooperation to achieve a shared goal. In education, for example, Ms. GARCIA-ALBANO explains that extended families often contribute financially to support a relative's schooling. "People give what they can, even when they don't have much," she said, "and that's something very good about the Philippines."

When asked about what she'd like Japanese people to know about the Philippines, Ms. GARCIA-ALBANO emphasizes the country's beautiful beaches and other important tourist sites. The Philippines is

known for beaches and surfing spots like La Union in the north and Siargao in the south. Still, there's also cultural heritage, like the Banaue Rice Terraces, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Their tourism goes far beyond sand and sea. Ms. GARCIA-ALBANO also pointed out that while tourists tend to focus on Manila, Cebu, and Boracay, the Philippines has so many more regions worth exploring.

Ms. GARCIA-ALBANO's story of how she became an Ambassador was very inspiring. As a child, she aspired to become a lawyer, influenced by her father, great-grandfather, and other relatives who were lawyers. She pursued law after working for several years after college. "I didn't plan to become an ambassador either," she admitted. "It was an opportunity that came up later in life. But I always tried to do my best in whatever role I had. One thing led to another, and here I am."



With over 320,000 Filipinos living in Japan, Ms. GARCIA-ALBANO's primary goal is to ensure their welfare. She also highlighted Japan's crucial role in Philippine

development. Japan is the Philippines' number one source of development aid. Japan's contributions can be seen in their roads, bridges, and first subway system.

Speaking of gender equality, Ms. GARCIA-ALBANO proudly shared that the Philippines ranks highly in global gender gap indexes. The country is third in East Asia and the Pacific, and 25th in the world. Gender equality isn't just a concept in the Philippines but is mandated by law. Government departments are required to allocate at least 5% of their budgets to gender and development programs.

Ms. GARCIA-ALBANO expresses gratitude to the Japanese people for their friendship and hospitality. She expresses gratitude for accepting many Filipino workers in Japan. She encourages Japanese students to come visit the Philippines, learn English, experience their culture, and enjoy their beaches and food.

Finally, with the 70th anniversary of Philippine-Japan diplomatic relations approaching in 2026, she hinted at more cultural exchanges and celebrations on the horizon.



Singapore Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On September 12th, 2024, the International School Network visited the Embassy of Singapore in Japan for an interview with the Ambassador His Excellency Mr. ONG Eng Chuan.

Mr. ONG began the interview by highlighting two unique aspects of Singapore's education system. He explained that all students learn English as a first language, regardless of their ethnic background. A second language, based on the student's heritage (Chinese, Malay, or Tamil), is also mandatory. This policy is a testament to Singapore's commitment to preserving individual ethnic cultures within a cohesive national identity. He also described the implementation of subject-based banding, a system that groups students by ability in different subjects. This allows students to reach their maximum potential in areas where

they excel, moving beyond the traditional method of grouping them based on a single overall average.

Mr. ONG pointed to a sense of vulnerability that unites the Singaporean nation. Having gained independence only in 1965, he explained that Singaporeans understand the need to work together to ensure the country's survival and continued growth. This collective awareness is the main force that brings the diverse population together.



Mr. ONG emphasized the importance of trust and respect. Citing the conflicts, he stated that a lack of trust and respect among nations is at the root of global instability. He urged leaders to work together to rebuild trust and to respect each other's cultures and ways of doing things. He also expressed hope that countries like Singapore and Japan, which enjoy a peaceful environment, will continue to work together to ensure stability in their region.

Mr. ONG believes that the younger generation, with its entrepreneurial spirit and innovative use of technology, can create a sustainable Japan for the future.

Mr. ONG expressed a desire to build emotional bonds beyond the strong economic relationship that already exists. He also proudly pointed out examples of cultural exchange, such as a Singaporean leading the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra and a Japanese head coach leading Singapore's national soccer team.

Finally, Mr. ONG shared a personal anecdote about his journey from an aspiring engineer to a diplomat. After studying electronic engineering at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, he realized he desired a more dynamic career than programming computers. He was granted a chance to join the foreign ministry and never looked back. He concluded by encouraging students to explore their passions and find their own unique paths in life.



Czech Republic Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On September 17th, 2024, the International School Network visited the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Japan for an interview with the Ambassador His Excellency Mr. Martin KLUČAR.

Mr. KLUČAR explains the accessibility of the Czech education system. Education is largely free of charge, from elementary through university, for students who study in the Czech language. This policy is a reflection of the nation's belief in education as a fundamental right. The country also boasts specialized year-round art schools that offer diplomas in music, painting, and other creative fields. In addition, 26 public universities are open to both Czech and international students, with many Japanese students coming to study medicine and music. On the topic of national identity, Mr. KLUČAR shared the history of the Czech Republic. Having been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for nearly 400 years, the nation later formed Czechoslovakia with its Slovak neighbors after World War I. He pointed out

that in 1993, the two countries peacefully split, becoming two sovereign nations built on mutual respect. Today, while cherishing its national identity, the Czech Republic is an active member of the European Union, a framework that proves "unity doesn't require uniformity." Mr. KLUČAR highlighted the capital city of Prague, a UNESCO World Heritage site, as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Beyond the capital, he spoke of a rich landscape perfect for nature lovers, with a 150-year-old system of hiking trails.



Mr. KLUČAR recalled that as a child, he initially wanted to be a teacher, inspired by the long summer holidays. However, after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, his ambitions shifted. He felt a deep desire to contribute to the new democratic system, which led him to join the Foreign Service. He emphasized that this journey has allowed him to serve in Japan, a country he deeply respects. Mr. KLUČAR believes the first step toward world peace is active commitment from individuals and nations. Mr. KLUČAR stressed that peace is not passive and requires diplomacy,

deterrence, and cooperation. While acknowledging the United Nations is not perfect, he called it the most important platform for dialogue and resolution. The Czech Republic is actively committed to gender equality and is making progress, with government and private companies working toward balanced representation in leadership roles.



As ambassador to Japan, he views his role as a coordinator and a representative, a rewarding job that creates meaningful outcomes for both nations. His goals include strengthening cooperation in areas such as energy security, defense, and innovation. He also sees great value in cultural and academic exchanges, noting that many Japanese students study in the Czech Republic and vice versa. In his final message, Mr. KLUČAR encouraged students to use their opportunities to engage with the world through travelling, staying informed, and following their dreams. He urges students to be active and engaged, believing in their ability to make a difference and build a better future.

Bahrain Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On September 11th, 2024, the International School Network visited the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain in Japan for an interview with the Ambassador His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Mohammed Yusuf ALDOSERI. Bahrain and Japan share a strong, long-standing relationship across politics, economics, humanitarian aid, sports, education, and tourism. Economically, their trade amounts to \$2 billion. Bahrain exports goods like oil, fiberglass, jellyfish, crab, and aluminum to Japan. Notably, Bahrain's fiberglass is used in Japanese trains, and its jellyfish is utilized in Japan's pharmaceutical industry. In return, Bahrain imports high-quality Japanese technology, including automobiles and electrical equipment, which Bahrainis value for their durability despite the cost. Mr. ALDOSERI mentioned that Japanese cuisine is also popular in Bahrain, with many Japanese restaurants.

The people of Bahrain are united by their shared religion, culture, and strong family values. The country's small size and population of about 1.5 million fosters a sense of being "one big family." Family values are crucial, with children often continuing to live with their parents even after marriage. Mr. ALDOSERI emphasized the importance of caring for parents, as they cared for you, and maintaining close contact.



Bahrain boasts a rich tourism sector with many historical sites. Archaeological sites dating back over 5000 years include old forts, castles, and temple ruins. A unique historical site is the "burial mounds," a massive ancient graveyard where people brought the deceased, believing it to be the "land of eternity." The historic Souk, a traditional market, is filled with antiques, spices, and local goods. Bahrain also has modern attractions like shopping malls, movie theaters, and bars. The country is religiously diverse,

with mosques, temples, churches, and synagogues. It is home to the first Formula 1 circuit in the Middle East, which opened in 2004, and one of the largest theme parks. Medical tourism is also a growing sector.



Mr. ALDOSERI aspired to be a doctor or an engineer as a child. He later chose to study commerce, business, and finance at university before joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His diplomatic career began in the financial department, where he worked with the United Nations in New York for nine years. Driven by an interest in politics, he transitioned to the political department and served as an ambassador in Germany and Belgium before his current post in Japan. He believes we must learn to live as one family in a "global village. He is working to ensure that Bahrainis in Japan feel safe and to increase business and investment opportunities.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Interview

By Karen Nishina



On September 4th, 2024, the International School Network visited the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Tokyo Office for an interview with the Director Mr. Roberto BENES.

Mr. BENES has dedicated his life to UNICEF, with a career of 26 years in 10 countries. He began as a researcher, focusing on the critical issue of child labor, which affects hundreds of millions of children globally. This research led him to Senegal, where he worked for four years on a project helping children forced into labor and those trafficked. Following a devastating tsunami in 2004, Mr. Benes spent three years in Indonesia providing humanitarian aid, including psychological support and family reunification for children separated from their parents. He then moved to Mexico and Jordan, where he conducted child poverty analysis and helped

governments develop child support programs. He later served as a country director in Mongolia and Argentina before being called to the UNICEF headquarters in New York. There, he led the "Generation Unlimited" partnership, a program dedicated to helping young people transition from school to employment, a crucial issue in many countries. His journey brought him to Tokyo, where he now manages relations with the Japanese government, one of UNICEF's most important donors.



Mr. BENES emphasized that everyone can be a "testimony" for children.. He stressed that mobilizing public opinion is a powerful way to advocate for peace, as governments listen to people's voices. He urged young people to organize and use their voices to demonstrate for global peace, especially since many live in countries unaffected by war. Mr. BENES's passion for his work is rooted in a strong sense of personal responsibility and the belief that individual happiness is connected to helping others. He believes that those who are born into a safe and healthy life

have a responsibility to help those who are less fortunate.

Mr. BENES's personal goals as director are to ensure continued support from the Japanese government and to communicate Japan's generosity to the world.

Mr. BENES encourages Japanese students to develop a "global mindset." He explained that while Japan is a wonderful and safe country, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, with issues like pandemics and climate change affecting everyone regardless of borders. He encourages students to take an active interest in what is happening beyond Japan. He also emphasized the importance of knowledge and learning foreign languages, describing a new language as "a key that opens an entire house full of rooms."

Mr. BENES expressed his belief that the United Nations is an ideal environment for those who want to work internationally while remaining connected to people in need, and that he has never had a single doubt about his career choice in 26 years.



World Food Programme (WFP) Interview

By Karen Nishina



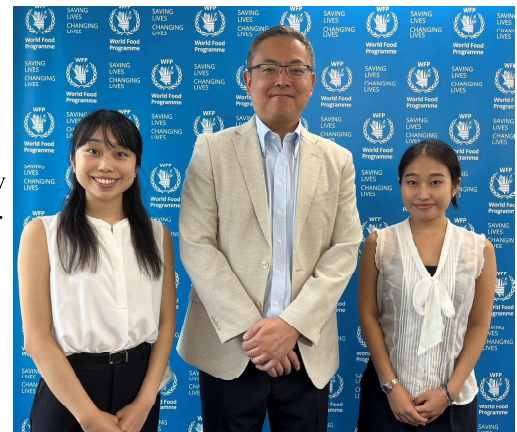
On September 3rd, 2024, the International School Network visited the World Food Programme (WFP) Japan Relations Office for an interview with the Director Mr. Yasuhiro TSUMURA.

Mr. TSUMURA's journey to the WFP was fueled by a lifelong aspiration to work internationally. After working for a Japanese trading company, he left to pursue a graduate degree in international relations at Sophia University. Inspired by Japanese UN officials and the end of the Cold War, he developed an interest in humanitarian aid and peacekeeping. Mr. TSUMURA's career with the WFP began after he was accepted into the Junior Professional Officers (JPO) program. He was

first deployed to Rome at the international headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). His work involved high-level conferences and coordination between the WFP and intergovernmental forums. Following his time in Rome, he moved to Kosovo before returning to Japan for two years to manage partnerships with the Japanese government. He then went back to Rome before being deployed to Africa for 15 years, where he worked in countries such as Kenya, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. In Senegal, he worked for an office that covered 20 countries in Western Africa, providing emergency advice and supporting small farmers with funding from Japan. Mr. TSUMURA returned to Japan in July 2023 to assume his current role as the director of the WFP, marking his 26th year with the organization.

Mr. TSUMURA questions whether people can live in complete peace, noting that history is filled with both conflict and peaceful times. He emphasizes that while eradicating negativity may be impossible, alleviating it is achievable through tolerance and acceptance. Mr. TSUMURA is proud of the WFP's action-oriented and concrete approach. Although it is less well-known than other organizations, it is the world's largest humanitarian organization, supporting 150 million people annually across 120 countries.

He highlights WFP's swift response to emergencies. A recent example is a WFP vehicle being shot down in Palestine, demonstrating their commitment to providing aid even in dangerous situations. His personal goal is to raise the WFP's recognition, especially among the younger generation. He hopes to contribute to bridging the gap between the Japanese public, the WFP, and world issues. He also shared that his experiences abroad helped him gain a more balanced and appreciative view of Japan, recognizing both its positive and negative aspects. Mr. TSUMURA emphasizes that we live in an interconnected world where solidarity and tolerance are crucial.



Israel Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On August 8th, 2024, the International School Network visited the Embassy of Israel in Tokyo for an interview with the Ambassador His Excellency Mr. Gilad COHEN. Mr. COHEN explained Israel's transformation into a leader in technology and innovation. He recounted a pivotal moment in the 1970s and 80s when the country realized that its focus on manufacturing cars was misguided. Instead, Israel shifted its strategy to importing cars from Japan and investing in its core strengths, hi-tech and innovation. This strategic pivot led to the development of groundbreaking technologies such as Mobileye, which helps prevent car accidents. This innovative mindset is fostered by an education system that encourages students to ask questions, challenge teachers, and embrace mistakes, an approach that has made Israel a "startup nation."

Mr. COHEN emphasized the immense potential of cooperation between Israel's technological prowess and Japan's industrial power. He provided a powerful example of a new instrument developed by two Israeli

professors to detect breast cancer with 90% accuracy by simply blowing into a tube, a significant improvement over traditional methods. He noted that this instrument is already being produced by a Japanese doctor in Ishigaki, highlighting the ability of Israeli-Japanese collaboration to improve global health and change the world.



Mr. COHEN highlighted the rich culture of Israel. Its official languages are Hebrew and Arabic, and the country is home to diverse communities, including Orthodox Jews and Arabs. He stressed the importance of coexistence, particularly in cities where both Jewish and Arab populations live together. He also mentioned that despite being a Middle Eastern nation, Israel often faces cultural barriers in the region, which has led to its sports teams competing in Europe. He pointed out that Israel has a vibrant cultural scene that includes cinema, theater, dancing, art, museums, and concerts, showcasing a dynamism that resonates with many other nations.

Mr. COHEN spoke with pride about Israel's

diverse and beautiful natural landscape. Despite its small size, the country offers a wide range of natural features, from the beaches of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea to the mountains and deserts. He explained that Israelis have a strong connection to these natural environments, often visiting them for activities like hiking, skiing, and diving. Israel's geographical concentration in the central region, he noted, is a challenge the nation hopes to address by encouraging a more even distribution of its population. The country is also home to numerous important religious sites for Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and the ambassador affirmed that Israel is welcoming to people of all faiths.



Mr. COHEN shared his aspiration to achieve peace with the Palestinian people. He expressed hope that his message would be seen as a sign of hope for the future. He also encourages students to pursue careers that are both meaningful and fulfilling, emphasizing that finding a purpose in life is key to happiness.

Narai-juku (Kiso, Nagano)

By Karen Nishina



Narai-juku stands as a testament to Japan's rich history and enduring cultural heritage. The entire town has been meticulously preserved, and this preservation extends far beyond the physical structures to encompass the very way of life passed down through generations.

The International School Network has had the privilege of visiting Narai-juku multiple times, but on this particular occasion, we had the honor of meeting with Mr. SAITO, a master craftsman specializing in the art of lacquerware. His commitment to the town, however, goes much further. He also serves as the Chairman of the Tourism and Culture Committee of the Narai-juku Preservation Council Secretariat. And he works diligently to preserve the buildings of Narai-juku, which has been designated an

Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings.

His workshop, located within a historic kura (storehouse), felt like a bridge between the past and the present. In this ancient structure, Mr. SAITO has inherited not only the tools of his trade but also the crucial knowledge of humidity control, a skill absolutely essential for the delicate process of lacquer application. His work is a perfect example of how tradition can remain relevant and dynamic in the modern age.



While he is deeply committed to traditional lacquer crafts, Mr. SAITO also possesses a remarkable creative spirit, constantly innovating to produce new and compelling pieces.

We were particularly struck by his modern creations, such as elegant earrings crafted in the shape of origami cranes and a stunning vessel made from knotted string (nawame-shikki), both beautifully finished with

traditional lacquer. These pieces demonstrate that tradition is not a rigid set of rules but a vibrant, evolving foundation upon which new art can be built.

Mr. SAITO's work encapsulates the very essence of Narai-juku: a place where the deep roots of history nourish a thriving and forward-looking community. It was a truly inspiring experience that reaffirmed the importance of preserving both our cultural treasures and the passionate individuals who keep them alive.



The Islamic Republic of Mauritania Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On September 13th, 2023, the International School Network visited the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania in Tokyo to interview the First Counsellor Mr. HJOUR Cheikh Tidjani.

First Counsellor Mr. HJOUR Cheikh Tidjani expresses the Mauritanian government's respect and gratitude towards Japan's support in fields such as the export of Japanese rice, the construction of schools for education, the construction of hospitals for medical purposes, and the development of infrastructure in the field of fishery. Mr. HJOUR Cheikh Tidjani appreciates the ongoing support from Japan. He wants Japanese investors in private sectors to come and see the rich natural resources including mining, natural energies (wind and solar), as well as their agriculture. Overall, Mauritania is rich in energy and is a fertile country good for investment, so he hopes for the world to

know more about it.

Reflecting on his own journey, Mr. HJOUR Cheikh Tidjani shares that he aspired to become an ambassador during his university days. Presently, he holds the position of the First Counsellor, and hopes to achieve the role of an ambassador in the future. Mr. HJOUR Cheikh Tidjani believes that there are both positive and negative aspects to globalization, stating that it is "an arm with two faces." Starting with the positive aspects, globalization allows all to learn from one another. However, this can also be negative since imitation without giving credit to the original also becomes accessible.



Additionally, he states that poverty is a crucial topic which needs to be discussed thoroughly, especially in Africa. In order for poverty to decrease, distribution of wealth is necessary in addition to further emphasis on the importance of education.

In terms of gender equality, there is a quota system headed by the president to secure opportunities for women. For instance, in the parliament, women are able to

get special treatment. As a result there are many women ambassadors, ministers and directors in the country. This may come from the culture of respecting women in Mauritania. Mr. HJOUR Cheikh Tidjani mentions that the wife in a household has the tendency of being the "master" - the teachings of a wife are passed to the husband and then the children. Moreover, there is a traditional saying that men put their wives "on their heads," and not "under their feet," which in fact is the case for Mr. HJOUR Cheikh Tidjani's household as well. He mentions that when visiting Mauritania, this tradition can be seen just by one glance. For Japanese students, Mr. HJOUR Cheikh Tidjani encourages everyone to never stop studying. He believes that studying is an action that starts early in childhood, and should not stop until one's death. Towards the Japanese people, he emphasizes to continue the kind behavior, hard work, innovations in technology which will eventually help people that are in need.



The Republic of Sudan Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On December 20th, 2023, the International School Network visited the Embassy of the Republic of Sudan, Japan to interview Mr. Ali Mohamed Ahmed Osman MOHAMED, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of Sudan.

Mr. MOHAMED aspired to become an officer in the military as well as a businessman that runs a shopping center. Currently as a diplomat, his ultimate goal is to sustain international peace.

He mentions that the education in Sudan needs more attention regarding the budget, the quality, and the enrollment of children in remote areas. Especially in remote areas, Sudan lacks resources including teachers, materials, and budget. In Sudan the total budget allocated to education is only 3% from

the GDP whereas Japan allocates 4.1%. He emphasizes that although a 1.1% difference does not look like a big difference, it is in fact significant when looking at each country's GDP; Sudan's GDP is 51 billion USD and Japan is 4.232 trillion USD.



In the future, he hopes for a minimum of 20% of the country's GDP will be allocated to education, especially to remote areas.

Mr. MOHAMED mentions the importance of respecting international order such as the laws and agreements, and working towards tackling social issues as an international community. One step to this is by allowing more countries to become representatives in the United Nations Security Council. He believes diversity is key when uniting people, and can lead to prosperity. In this sense, although Sudan is diverse in ethnicity, language, color, attitude, culture, and religion,

people share common values such as respect for elders, hospitality, and social bonds. Additionally, Sudanese are very warm and hospitable people, welcoming any guest with sincere generosity and respect. On a daily basis, it is common for Sudanese to meet and converse with their neighbors. In addition, on a weekly basis, it is common for Sudanese to visit their family members and relatives. Moreover, Sudan has many ancient cultures that have been researched by numerous international universities. Research showed that the oldest human being in the world existed in Sudan dating back to 8000 years ago. Additionally, Mr. MOHAMED highlights that Sudan is home to pyramids that are older than those in Egypt. Nature also plays a crucial role; Sudan preserves national parks, the Red Sea, mountains such as Marrah, and museums. Mr. MOHAMED appreciates cooperation with various countries including Japan to preserve these historical sites in Sudan.



The European Union Embassy Interview

By Karen Nishina



On December 7th, 2023, the International School Network visited the Embassy of the Delegation of the European Union to Japan for an interview with the Ambassador His Excellency Mr. Jean-Eric PAQUET.

Mr. PAQUET emphasizes the importance of collaboration across borders especially when there are disruptions in the global community where some are not fully respecting the international law. Every state that has borders, sovereignty, and legitimacy must not prevail and respect international laws. However, this does not mean that countries cannot defend themselves, but rather, simply with respect to rules of democracy. Therefore, there is significance for great powers such as the EU and Japan to provide humanitarian aid for Gaza and support the UN in rallying the international community against violations of international rules in the ongoing war in Ukraine.



Regarding cooperation between the EU and Japan, Mr. PAQUET mentions the strong economic partnership, celebrating the fifth anniversary of their trade agreement on February 1st 2024. The EU and Japan have established three partnerships including Digital, Green, and Connectivity along with the Strategic Partnership Agreement. Notably, he explains the EU's role as a security and defense actor, particularly in its support for Ukraine. Moreover, the EU and Japan are planning to establish a new security partnership, a topic discussed with the Japan Prime Minister Kishida and President Charles Michel of the European Council who met in Brussels in July 2023. Mr. PAQUET emphasizes that this partnership is distinct from a military alliance and is solely a security partnership.

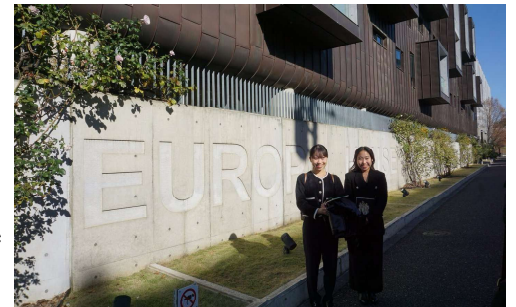
Additionally, he also discusses the EU's motto, "United in Diversity," which embodies the Union's approach to enriching its member states through exchanges that foster greater innovation, cooperation, and collective actions in crises.








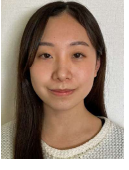






The EU promotes political and economic benefits through the free movement of people and academic exchange programs. This unique diversity in the EU brings together new perspectives such as in research and science. An example of cooperation is evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where collective efforts led to the rapid development and distribution of vaccines developed by a German company, Bio & Technology. Instead of prioritizing the vaccines for themselves, it was made available to all EU countries and globally at

the same time, coming from the EU's value of solidarity.

Mr. PAQUET expresses pride in the cooperation between Europe and Japan, especially in the field of spreading climate action. Currently, to achieve the 2050 goal, there is a need to reduce the temperature 40% by 2030. Although facing the challenges of building climate policies, the EU has been working to reduce emission for approximately 30 years. As a result, Europe as a whole today is accountable for merely 7% of the world's emissions. With this background in the EU, Mr. PAQUET discusses how we can best accelerate the transformation of the climate crisis with Japanese research organizations, businesses, and schools. His future hope is for the EU and Japan to work with countries such as South Asia, Africa, and Latin America by introducing infrastructure and technology. Finally, Mr. PAQUET passionately invites Japanese students to explore Europe's unique university system which has great cultural diversity and connectivity within communities. Additionally, the annual European higher education fair is held in Tokyo and Kyoto where there are exchange programs, scholarships, and curriculums taught in English at all levels.



International School Network Main Members

	<u>Karen Nishina</u> Director Sophia University		<u>Hina Amano</u> Reporter Sophia University		<u>Yuna Fujishima</u> Reporter Keio University		<u>Mito Kimura</u> Reporter Meiji University
	<u>Kazuha Ishii</u> Reporter Tokyo University of Science		<u>Mayu Bae</u> Reporter Meiji Gakuin University		<u>Meina Kuroda</u> Reporter Sophia University		<u>Honoka Kajiwara</u> Reporter Ritsumeikan University
	<u>Manami Kita</u> Reporter Seiwa Gakuin Senior High School		<u>Mona Tanabe</u> Reporter Yokohama Futaba High School		<u>Rin Kusama</u> Reporter Ferris Girls' Senior High School		<u>Orie Nishina</u> Chief Manager Kanagawa International School