

Education for Children of Foreign Roots is Investment for the Future: Invitation of Dr. Janet Murguía

This summer, the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership invited Dr. Janet Murguía, President and CEO of Unidos US, to Japan as part of the U.S.–Japan Public Intellectual Network program. Unidos US is the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. During her one week stay in Japan she visited Tokyo, Kyoto, and Aichi prefecture (the city of Toyota and Homi Danchi), and engaged with people working on multiculturalism in various communities. In addition, on August 17, she gave a public lecture at International House of Japan, “The Journey towards Equity” .

This was her first visit to Japan and she observed the current situation in Japan with keen interest and fresh perspectives.



Dr. Janet Murguía



With Mr. Kato of Waseda Univ.

The highlight of her trip was Aichi prefecture. In Toyota, she had an opportunity to meet with Mayor Toshihiko Ohta and Representative Tetsuya Yagi at city hall where they exchanged views about local and national policies on immigration and issues surrounding foreign residents in the communities.



With Mayor Ohta



With Repr. Yagi (right) and
Mr. Matsui (left)

She then moved to Homi Danchi where the majority of the residents are Brazilian-Japanese to learn about their everyday life and the local community's efforts to cooperate with the Brazilian-Japanese residents. Representatives of the local community organization Torcida guided Dr. Murguía around Homi Danchi and hosted a community gathering attended by around fifty residents. Dr. Murguía enjoyed the casual exchange of views and experience with community leaders and residents.



At Homi Danchi

During her public lecture at I-House, “The Journey Towards Equity,” Dr. Murguía shared many important messages on immigration issues in Japan.

First, she explained multiculturalism is a challenge for both the U.S. and Japan,

“Believe me, when I talk about our country (US), we have made some progress but we are far from perfect, and we have our own challenges today.”

Also realizing that the current situation of immigration is an immense challenge for Japan, she provided encouragement with her remarks, *“I do believe that there are opportunities for Japan to use its ingenuity and find the will to move forward. You have a transportation system that is the envy of the world. On the one hand, you can be a shining example for that ingenuity to the rest of the world. I believe you have the capacity to solve these other (immigration) challenges.”*

On Homi Danchi, Dr. Murguía noted some of the difficult living situations of Brazilian-Japanese residents and her encounter with locals who support them. She underscored the fact that those who tackle problems of multiculturalism in Japan are “stars” . *“You have a star, people who can help build the path forward for Japan are people like Ms. Kiyoe Ito who’s the president of an NPO called*

Torcida. She led me through the Homi Danchi area. Another star who lived in Homi Danchi is Gustavo Moriyama. He came from Brazil when he was six years old, and he attended the Japanese schools. And it's not easy. But despite that, he learned Japanese. And today he's working for a human resource company and he's recruiting people to find jobs."

Further, she emphasized the importance of providing opportunities to foreigners and their children and giving them a chance to integrate into society, both are an "investment" for the future. As she so eloquently stated, *"I would definitely recommend that Japan also consider their need for workers to help its aging population, and what integrating them into Japanese society and investing in them today would mean for Japan's future."*

She conveyed words of encouragement as she concluded her lecture with these parting words: *"I'm not coming here as someone saying we have the answers. We don't. I'm sharing what I believe have been tough lessons learned, and where I feel we have made some progress, but we still have a long way to go. But I will tell you, the more that we can tackle our challenges and our issues with a lens of equity, of fairness, and values, I think we're going to put ourselves on a strong path forward."*