

Sunday, Aug. 26, 2012

## Embassies join to give kids look at other cultures

By **MIZUHO AOKI**

Staff writer

The Children's International Festa 2012 in Tokyo gave kids hands-on experience with other cultures Saturday, from making beeswax candles New Zealand-style to learning Mayan numbers.

The annual event, the fourth of its kind, was organized by Somos & Co. to provide children with an opportunity to learn about other countries through actual experience, spokeswoman Madoka Soma said.

Nine embassies, including those of Ecuador, Mexico and Honduras, offered different workshops during the event at Yebisu Garden Place in Shibuya Ward.



Candle power: Children make candles from beeswax Saturday at a workshop run by the New Zealand Embassy during the Children's International Festa 2012 in Shibuya Ward, Tokyo. YOSHIAKI MIURA

Thai Embassy representatives held vegetable carving lessons, while their counterparts from the Turkish Embassy taught ways to make a strap using a piece of Turkish embroidery.

"It was fun. . . . I chose (Ecuador's workshop) because I love animals. I want to visit this country someday," 6-year-old Kokoha Yamanaka said after coloring a picture of a seal at the Ecuadorean Embassy's booth.

"This is a very important opportunity for kids and their parents and also for us to know about each other's countries," Bolivar Torres, minister of the Embassy of Ecuador, told The Japan Times.

Ruben Freixas, a special adviser to the Honduran ambassador, agreed, saying that in a multicultural society, children need to learn and deepen their understanding of other peoples.



"In the future, Japan needs more people from abroad. If you want to have a balanced society, there needs to be understanding (of each other). This kind of event is (a) good initiative to teach kids that there are more (countries and cultures) outside Japan," Freixas said.

As part of the event, the Children's International Speech Contest was held later that day, supported by

Bugs 101: Gen Koito makes a prize-winning speech in English about beetles at the festival. YOSHIAKI MIURA

The Japan Times and other organizations.

The English speech contest involved 15 elementary school pupils who talked about their future dreams. They were divided into three groups: first through third grades, fourth through sixth grades, and returnees.

First prize for the youngest group went to Gen Koito, a second-grader who spoke about his passion for beetles. In the upper grade group, Tomomi Nakamura, a fifth-grader, won first place for a speech about her dream to become an international lawyer to help both Japanese and foreigners. Fourth-grader Erika Koito won in the returnee group for her speech about why she wants to be a textile designer.