



"Sowing the Seeds of Prosperity for a Sustainable Micronesia"

JOINT COMMUNIQUE

The U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the U.S. Territory of Guam (Guam), the Republic of Palau (Palau), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and its states, Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Leaders of the governments of the CNMI, Guam, Palau, the RMI and the FSM and its states, Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap, held their 24th Micronesia Islands Forum (MIF - formerly the Micronesia Chief Executives Summit – MCSF) in Chuuk State, FSM on July 10-11, 2019.

The Forum reaffirmed the commitment of each of the participants, on behalf of their people and their governments, to establish closer ties, strengthen cooperation, and agree on initiatives for the benefit of members and the entire Micronesia Region.

The Honorable Johnson Elimo, of Chuuk State, as Chairman, expressed his appreciation to the Leaders and their jurisdictional representatives for their attendance and active participation in the 24th Micronesia Islands' Forum. The Leaders expressed their collective appreciation to Governor Elimo and the People of Chuuk for their warm hospitality.

Following the opening ceremonies of the Forum, which included statements by each of the Leaders, reports and recommendations from regional committees were given, along with presentations on a number of issues of interest in the region and the Leaders jointly directed action in their respective jurisdictions, as reflected in this 24th MIF Communiqué.

Leaders indicated that the invitations extended to the Republic of Nauru and the Republic of Kiribati to join the MIF as members shall remain in effect, and the respective Heads of State and Heads of Government look forward to welcoming these members of our Micronesia family to the MIF.



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Governor, State of Chuuk



Ralph DLG. Torres
Governor, CNMI



Lourdes Leon Guerrero
Governor, Guam



Thomas Remengesau Jr.
President, Rep. of Palau



David W. Panuelo
President, FSM



Hilda C. Heine
President, RMI



Marcelo K. Peterson
Governor, Pohnpei State



Henry Falan
Governor, State of Yap



Carson K. Sigrav
Governor, State of Kosrae



II. REGIONAL COMMITTEES

1. Regional Workforce Development Council (RWDC)

Members of the RWDC emphasized that workforce development should be people driven. This means training programs of any sorts should center around the needs of the people above all things. The Leaders recognized the importance of workforce development for the economic advancement of all MIF jurisdictions and the enrichment of their people and endorsed the recommendations of the Council to:

- Request Guam and/or the CNMI to consider opening a Job Corp Center in order to reduce the cost of participation from the current costs in Hawaii and on the West Coast of the United States. The FSM has utilized programs in Hawaii and West Coast U. S. in the past.
- Support quality training programs using U.S. Department of Labor certification standards to allow the highest level of participants' flexibility in finding good paying jobs.
- Support the opening of a vocational school in the FSM at the Pohnpei Agriculture and Trade School (PATS) in order to provide expanded vocational training opportunities and to provide equal opportunity of to all jurisdiction participants.
- Support the upgrading of Labor Division offices at the national and state levels to serve as focal points for workforce development and data collection.
- Create programs similar to the One Stop Shop (OSS) in support of migrants from the region to the U.S. in order to emphasize understanding and to minimize social and cultural clashes.
- Support the development of a locally acquired skills recognition initiative – supporting skills that have been acquired by locals through their daily activities such as boat operator, masseuse, handicrafts, etc.).

2. Regional Invasive Species Council (RISC)

The RISC expressed its appreciation to Leaders for their funding of the RISC Coordinator position last year. The Leaders recognized the accomplishments of the RISC over the past years in working to limit and



eradicate invasive species and endorsed the recommendations of the RISC to:

- Sign a resolution to Pacific partners such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States and others;
 - Acknowledging the fundamental importance of invasive species prevention, control and eradication to maintaining and building the resilience of Island natural resources to climate change and other natural shocks and perturbations,
 - Requesting that Pacific partners to collaborate in their efforts to assist the Region in implementing the six priority areas of the Regional Biosecurity Plan for Micronesia and Hawaii (RBP) – with special short-term emphasis on efforts to address Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) and Little Fire Ant (LFA), and
 - Encouraging the Regions development partners to assist in resourcing the Region’s efforts to implement the RBP.
- Develop procedures to increase departure inspections of cargo shipments from Guam to Micronesia ports of entry, including expanding the use of brown tree snake interdiction dogs to detect other species such as CRB and LFA, which can then be extended to other jurisdictions as needed to prevent the spread of invasive species to jurisdictions in the region that do not already have them, and to prevent destruction of economic development and food security efforts, such as the proposed copra processing industry in Chuuk;
- Use of an appropriate portion of GEF 6 funding to strengthen sea and airport inspections and monitoring and to prioritize invasive species eradication efforts;
- Assist in identifying funding, with the assistance of the Micronesia Islands Forum Secretariat (MIFS), to Fund the Pacific Plant Protection Organization (PPPO) meeting proposed for Micronesia in 2020, **The International Year of Plant Health** (Guam is current PPPO chair) to emphasize the importance of biosecurity in Micronesia and to increase public awareness of invasive species threats to our societies; and
- Direct the MIFS to assist in identifying five years of forward funding for the RISC Coordinator position and office.



3. Pacific Islands Regional Recycling Initiative Council (PIRRIC)

Numerous PIRRIC members reported on solid waste advancements in their respective jurisdictions including:

- FSM introduced a Bill to ban the importation of plastic products;
- The endorsement of the new Chuuk State Solid Waste Management Strategy Plan, the signing of the Chuuk State Clean Environment Act of 2018, the purchase, expansion and rehabilitation of numerous landfills and the introduction of a container law before the Chuuk State Legislature;
- The Amendment of the Plastic Bag Use Reduction Act in Palau to stop importation and distribution of plastic bags and the construction of a new landfill site at Aimeliik to serve Koror and Babeldaob;
- The construction of the new used oil facility in Pohnpei;
- The relocation of Korea's Recycling Program's Materials Redemption Facility from Okat to Tofo and the banning of shopping plastic bags in April 2019;
- The improvement of the Yap State public landfill sites as well as the collection services; and
- The implementation of RMI's own Container Deposit Recycling Program, which has yielded 11.7 million cans/pet/bottles containers from Fiscal Year 2018 to Fiscal Year 2019, paying a total of \$705,304 to the general public.

The Leaders recognized the improvements in solid waste management and recycling throughout the region and endorsed expanded regional cooperation, to include:

- Establishment of a PIRRIC Regional Coordinator Position in the MIFS after the identification of funding, and in line with such creation,
 - The establishment of a PIRRIC Network organization and the development of a scope of work for regional recycling activities;
 - The containment and disposal of used oil in the region; and
 - The establishment of a Marine Debris Program.



4. Regional Transportation Committee

In order to reduce shipping cost of the cargo bound for the other Micronesian islands, the Leaders requested, during the 23rd Micronesian Island Forum, that the Government of Guam reduce the transshipment cost for containers being transshipped through the Port of Guam. The Government of Guam responded that due to the establishment of a direct route by Matson's to the RMI, a 32% reduction of transshipped containers has occurred. Consequently, reduction in container charges was not possible.

The Guam Government also reviewed the Business Privilege Tax waiver on the transshipment of fuel and concluded that the removal of the waiver would create hardship to the other Micronesian islands and that such removal would not encourage any expansion of this fuel storage and transshipment industry on Guam. Instead of removing the tax exemption, the Port of Guam is looking to establish a tiered fee tied to transshipment volumes which may provide incentives to current and prospective petroleum providers to continue to store transshipment fuel on the island and hopefully be able to pass on such savings to the other Micronesian islands.

No progress has been made on the request to the FAA for continuation of Airport Improvement Program grants for the entire region or the availability of assistance augment the costs of training for ARRF personnel.

The Palau delegation reported to the Committee that Palau had requested the United States Coast Guard to conduct a regional auditors' training to assist the MIF member jurisdictions to implement their port security obligations. This provision of the training will rest on the ability of the ports in the MIF member jurisdictions and the Designated Authorities to fund their own travel and accommodation cost.

In response the Leaders:

- Endorsed the training and instructed the appropriate officials of the Designated Authority, Ports Authority and ports to move the item forward; and
- Endorsed an MOU to allow trained auditors to conduct external audits for other jurisdictions.

The Committee further reported that invasive aquatic species can be introduced into the marine environments of MIF member jurisdictions through ballast water on ships and the uncontrolled biofouling on the bottom of ships and other water-borne objects. Introduction of such



invasive aquatic species could potentially displace native marine species or irreversibly destroy the marine environment and its marine life.

In response, the Leaders:

- Recognized the threat that invasive aquatic species posed by way of unmanaged fouling of ships and other water-borne objects coming from foreign ports as a significant risk to its marine ecosystem and its tourism industry and instructed appropriate officials, namely Port State Control and Biosecurity officers, to establish necessary measures to reduce or mitigate the risk of introduction of invasive aquatic species.

Most of the MIF member jurisdictions are looking at the Okeanos Foundation's Vaka Motu initiative as another alternative to sustainable sea transport.

- The Leaders noted the presentation of Okeanos Foundation and Yap delegation; and
- Directed the Committee to explore the feasibility of support services, such as dry-docking facilities, to support the maintenance of the fleet and other vessels in the region and the training of crews through existing education facilities for Okeanos and other large vessels in MIF member jurisdictions.

5. Regional Health Committee

The Regional Health Committee reported that there continue to be significant achievements and improvements throughout the region, notably: 1) improvements in national and regional public health surveillance and laboratory capacities and systems; 2) implementation of new and expanded Electronic Health Records systems; 3) ramped up response to the 2011 declared USAPI Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Emergency Crisis with demonstrated improvements in some NCD risk factors amongst youth; 4) expanded health workforce development opportunities and pipelines; 5) enhanced cross-border partnerships amongst Pacific health leadership and health sector development partners in response to regional health threats and disasters; 6) renovated and expanded healthcare facilities and assets; 7) implementation of tele-health and tele-medicine platforms; 8) engagements in various research and best practice fora to discuss innovations in health service delivery; 9) improvements in grantsmanship and financial management practices; and 10) regional health policy development and advocacy.



However, the Committee noted that health sectors all over the world are dynamic systems, continuously needing to change, improve, and expand as local, regional and global circumstances and community needs evolve over time to deal with new threats. As such, for the 24th MIF, the RHC members agreed to highlight two critical issues for the Leaders' consideration.

The first was the critical need to address the continuing inequities of healthcare access for our Pacific Veterans who served honorably in the U. S. Armed Forces with the U. S. Veterans Affairs (VA). These inequities in healthcare access continue to have significant impacts on the health status of our Pacific Veterans and their families. Our local health systems continue to struggle, with limited skills and resources, to address the specialized healthcare needs of our Pacific Veterans. Given the potential for our Pacific Veterans to access healthcare services from the U.S. VA, there are avenues for these inequities to be mitigated.

The second is to inform and seek support from the Leaders to address the growing health security threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in our healthcare systems. AMR poses significant threats to both individual and population health outcomes and the cost of healthcare services. These new "super bugs", which are now resistant to one or more drugs, can no longer be effectively treated with conventional/routine treatment regimens. Healthcare service practices, treatment regimens, procurement of new and more expensive drugs will all need to be ramped up, posing significant burdens against existing human and financial constraints.

The Leaders recognized the ongoing need continue to improve healthcare care in the region while also being vigilant to new healthcare issues. The Leaders therefore endorsed two resolutions, as follows:

- RHC Resolution No.1 – Concerning equitable access to quality and comprehensive healthcare services for Pacific Island Veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families; and
- RHC Resolution No. 2 – Concerning strengthening USAPI health department capacities and systems to effectively address the health security threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

The Leaders also reiterated that NCDs are a critical issue in Micronesia and must be confronted at every level, directing the MIFS to review all prior resolutions to analyze the action items for NCDs and to report back to the Leaders. Leaders also recommended the convening of an NCD Policy Summit over the next year.



6. Regional Tourism Committee

The Regional Tourism Committee reported on efforts to expand global awareness of the Micronesia region through marketing programs that focus on the unique attractions found only in the region. Regarding prior initiatives, the Committee reported that it continues its initiatives endorsed by Leaders set forth at the 23rd MIF to:

- Continue its on-going efforts to establish a regional cruise industry and to develop an action plan that incorporates the recommendations made by the PATA Cruise Task Force;
- Develop a regional workforce development program to provide continuing job training for current tourism industry employees, establish a baseline of standards, skills and service requirements, and create additional employment and economic opportunities for industry employees;
- Continue efforts on the development of a regional sustainability policy for the tourism industry; and
- Develop a regional marketing action plan that incorporates a digital roadmap, bringing unique, adventurous, eco experiences of Micronesia onto the World Wide Web and stimulate the regional economy through sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism development.

In addition to supporting these on-going efforts, the Leaders endorsed the Tourism Committee recommendations to:

- Expand the number of limited flights throughout Micronesia and to find mechanisms to decrease the airfares;
- Work with Airlines and Cruise Ships to create Packaged Deals for Micronesia (Circle Micronesia) for travelers to travel to all Micronesia Islands on a discounted fare;
- Encourage other NTOs and STOs to promote Micronesia as a region in Travel Tradeshows by promoting the Brand Micronesia as well as sharing a booth to cut on costs;
- Use the 'remote clearance' for the cruise ships, a mechanism whereby information about the passengers is uploaded to secured "cloud" on the internet allowing digital immigration inspection.



- To recruit more members for PATA and PATA Micronesia Chapter; and
- To improve ports to allow for easy cruise ship and ADA access.

7. Regional Energy Committee

Only the energy representative from Chuuk attended the 24th MIF. He reported on the issues facing Chuuk and other jurisdictions. He indicated that jurisdictions need to focus on two things. 1) Integration of Renewable Energy and 2) Stability of the Grid. These imperative goals are hindered by the existence of old systems and distribution lines, and a lack of private sector engagement. Due to the antiquated systems, systems develop maintenance problems that are then augmented by renewable systems. In order to respond to these related issues, all sectors must work together.

The Leaders supported the concept of renewable energy and recognized the need to make diesel generation systems more efficient. They also recognized the difficulties with renewable integration and the importance of the stability of the grid. They noted that new technology through battery backups could help the issue of stability. Leaders also noted the potential for Power Purchase Agreements (PPA's) that can provide substantial savings to power users. In this regard, Leaders stressed that financing and affordability options through PPAs and Independent Power Producers (IPP) were the keys to upgrading antiquated energy systems in small island nations. Finally, the Leaders stressed the need to share information between jurisdictions to increase knowledge and options.

Leaders requested that the Energy Committee, with the assistance of the Secretariat undertake a review of energy costs throughout Micronesia in order to gain a better understanding of potential options.

8. Micronesia Challenge

The Micronesia Challenge hosted a lunch and made a presentation to Leaders focusing on the challenges facing the Islands in continuing the legacy of the Micronesia Challenge and in extending these original commitments into the future.

The Leaders recognized the enormous accomplishments of members through the Micronesia Challenge Initiative and committed to the Micronesia Challenge - MC 2030, which will build on the success and accomplishments of the MC, and pursue a collective approach to address critical issues such as sustainable livelihoods, fisheries management, enforcement capacity, and climate-related disaster risk reduction and management. These updated targets are aligned with jurisdictional



priorities and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

The Leaders recognized the tremendous success of the various scholarships supporting students to work on achieving the MC goals, and supported continuing investment in these program.

The Leaders further committed to support the following MC 2030 conservation and community benefit targets:

- Effectively manage at least 50% of marine resources and 30% of terrestrial resources across Micronesia (*linked SDG Goal 14.5; 15.1*);
- Increase the number of community members within each jurisdiction who are deriving livelihoods, including any type of income or revenue, from sustainably managed natural resources (as determined by MC Measures Working Group) (*linked to SDG Goal 14.7*);
- Reduce the risks from climate impacts for communities within flood zones and on low-lying islands (*linked to SDG Goal 13.1, 14.2*); and
- Reduce invasive species and increase restoration of habitats (*linked to SDG Goal 15.5*).

The Leaders also committed to support the following MC 2030 Process Targets:

- Incorporate regional and jurisdictional fisheries management approaches, integrated with MPAs; (*linked to SDG Goal 14.4*);
- Increase local investment by MC governments in sustainable finance mechanisms, such as green fees and endowments, to leverage additional external investment to achieve new conservation and community benefit targets;
- Institutionalize and fully resource the MC Regional Office, including funding for at least three staff (Executive Director, Administrative position and Communications support); and
- Expand The MC Steering Committee to include two focal points from each jurisdiction, one cabinet-level political designate and one operational / technical designate.



9. Regional Telecommunications Committee (RTC)

The RTC reported to the Leaders that the Micronesia region has made good progress in broadband infrastructure and services development and with the MIF's support to its Members, in fostering telecommunication/ICT capabilities and connectivity and promoting innovative services and applications. This will contribute to sustainable telecommunication/ICT growth and bridging the digital divide.

The RTC further expressed the commitment for strengthened regional cooperation and collaboration to facilitate the development of a conducive policy and regulatory environment that will encourage innovation and help promote an open and competitive economy. The RTC noted the following accomplishments to meet the Sustainable Development Goals throughout the MIF jurisdictions, specifically, SDG 9.C – to “significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.”

- In the FSM, the establishment of FSMT Cable Corporation in 2018, a key component being the establishment of the FSMT Cable Corporation, which owns and operate FSM's fiber optic cable investments, and provide international and domestic bandwidth to competitive operators on a wholesale basis and the establishment of an independent regulator, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA);
- In Yap and Chuuk States of the FSM, the activation of the international fiber optic cables in line with the previously reported FSM national policy;
- In Saipan, the extension of individual counseling services, pharmacy services and, in the near future, dentistry services to the remote islands of Tinian and Rota through telehealth, telepharmacy and teledentistry.
- In the FSM and in Palau, the commitment to improving connectivity to support e-government, e-education and e-health initiatives.

The Leaders recognized the dynamic improvement in telecommunications in the region and acknowledged the work member jurisdictions have undertaken to liberalize the telecommunications sector to encourage competition. The Leaders endorsed:



- Research into the viability of developing a regional regulatory coordinating body;
- Changing the designation of the Regional Telecommunications Committee to the ICT (Information Communication Technology) Committee of the MIF, noting that “ICT” encompasses a more diverse environment;
- Use the Micro-Pal template in the creation of a MIF Working Group on ICT to be tasked with tracking the progress of MIF initiatives in relation to Communications; and
- Annual meetings of MIF member Regulators, Commissions & Operators.

III. OTHER MATTERS

1. WICHE

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education provided a presentation once again on its potential program assistance to Micronesian students and encouraged every Micronesian jurisdiction to begin making its proportionate dues to begin enjoying the scholarship benefits available to Micronesian students and families. Currently, only Guam and the CNMI are members. In 2018, CNMI and Guam received benefits of \$1.95 million while paying dues of \$153,000. Current dues for 2020 for the entire Micronesian region is \$156,000. This will be split evenly between those who chose to become members and pay dues. If all six Pacific jurisdictions each pays dues, individual dues, per jurisdiction would equal \$26,000 in 2020. The FSM, Palau and the RMI have all reported that they are close to passing the necessary legislation to become members. Leaders endorsed membership in WICHE and supported quick passage of the necessary legislation to complete membership.

2. Proposed Gender Equality Committee

The RMI provided a presentation on Gender Equality stressing the on-going need to support gender equality in the islands, and requested the creation of a Standing Gender Equality Committee within the MIF. Leaders expressed their support for expanded gender equality and the creation of the Standing Gender Equality Committee.



3. Department of Agriculture

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) made a presentation to the leaders regarding the services provided by the USDA in assisting Micronesia to combat invasive species specifically related to the six priority areas identified by the Leaders at the 23rd MIF for implementation of the Regional Biosecurity Plan

4. Micronesia Cleanup Day

The Leaders declared a Micronesia Cleanup Day to be scheduled on September 13, 2019 and to be orchestrated simultaneously on all Micronesia islands.

5. We are Ocean and Micronesia Resource Center

The NGOs 'We Are Oceania' (WAO) in the State of Hawaii and the Micronesia Resource Center' (MRC) in the Territory of Guam offer essential services for Micronesians. Leaders directed respective governments to work towards ensuring that WAO and MRC collaborate with each other as well as the respective Micronesia island Governments, and the FSM National Government, in particular, direct its Consul Generals to assist in developing this collaboration.

6. SPREP Northern Office

The Leaders welcomed the report by the RMI and noted the need to further support the SPREP Northern Office financially. Although there is an interim budget, to establish the Office by this year, there is still a funding gap for the full operation and services of the Office in Micronesia Region

IV. CLOSING

1. Venue.

The Leaders welcomed the FSM's offer to host the 25th MIF in June/July of 2020.

2. Closing Remarks.

The Leaders all expressed their gratitude to Chuuk for hosting the 24th MIF and reaffirmed their commitment to their continuing partnership in the region.



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