

REMARKS BY FIRST LADY PATRICIA E. EDWIN
AT THE EVENT TO COMMEMORATE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD
Saturday, October 10, 2020

As Delivered

Kaselehlie Maingko & Good Morning to all of you. My deepest respect to each and every one present here. I would like to pay special recognition to:

- Our FSM President, His Excellency David W. Panuelo

- Her Excellency Carmen G. Cantor, US Ambassador to the FSM;
- The Honorable AG Joses Gallen, Secretary Dept. Of Justice & Mrs.
- FSM Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Kandhi Elieisar & Mrs.
 - The Girl Scout Troops
 - Girls with Disabilities
- Everyone

I would like to first begin by thanking the U.S. Embassy and Her Excellency Carmen G. Cantor for organizing this exciting event on the 8th Anniversary of the International Day of the Girl Child. I'm not a little girl but I too am excited about today's event, especially with the super hero theme. Ambassador Cantor expressed that her vision is to empower women and girls, and through events like this and through the programs like the Girl Scouts, we can say that we are already heading in this direction. In my capacity as the First Lady of the Federated States of Micronesia, I would like to solicit the U.S. Embassy and other partners, including the National and State Departments of Education, and UNICEF, to expand the Girl Scouts program across the FSM, so that every girl has the opportunity to learn new skills and to challenge themselves.

All children are deserving of love and inclusion, whether they are young boys or young girls, and I am grateful that we can share this day together most especially with the young girls with special needs. I took the liberty of inviting 35 young girls from the Pohnpei Department of Education's Special Education services. You being here makes today extra special and I hope that we see today as the launching of further inclusion of girls with special needs in social activities. May we give our girls a round of applause please....

Today it is about YOU—YOU young girls of this great Nation and beyond. You are here today because someone believes in you. That someone could either be your mom, your father, your teacher, a teacher aide, or simply a volunteer who believes in you that you can be whatever you are

meant to be. And it is the dedication of parents and or adults involvement today that will empower our girls for tomorrow.

Even though our country is relatively young, we are very lucky compared to other countries around the world. It took centuries for other countries to achieve equal rights of women. For us here in the FSM we have equal rights embedded in our Constitution. We have equal opportunities. We have equal rights to education. And as a result We have women working as lawyers and doctors, we have women working as businessowners and public servants, and we have women in places of power and influence. We have women as Ambassadors to other countries and multilateral organizations, such as Her Excellency Jane Chigiyal, our Nation's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, or Teresia Filipin, FSM Consul General in Guam. We have women judges such Associate Judge Biuleen Carl, at the FSM Supreme Court. At Pohnpei Supreme Court we have Associate Justices Mayceleen Anson and Erwine Nanpei and Municipal Judges such as Antonia Primo who is also Likend Uh, Kiyumi Albert and Irene Phillip. We have women in our State Legislatures, such as Senators Lekka, Ludwig and Movick in Pohnpei State; we have women in our State and National Cabinets, such as FSM Postmaster General Ginger Porter Mida; Pohnpei Attorney General Monaliza Abello-Pangelinan, and Pohnpei Director of Treasury & Administration Christina Elnei. For those of you wondering why we don't have any women in the National Congress, well, you have until the beginning of November to put your name in the March 2021 election.

Other women deserving special recognition that are often times go unnoticed but they are the front line workers of our education & health care system. They are the hardworking dedicated Teachers and Nurses of our Nation. These are real successes, and we should celebrate them. May I pause here and ask that we give all these role models a round of applause?

That's not to say that everything is perfect. While girls academically outperform boys in FSM schools, which is unique among most Pacific Islands, many of our girls dropout of school. We have a visible problem where many young girls become pregnant, so they drop out of school—and then their boyfriend or husband abandons them, either to continue their own education or to work, often times abroad. I am told that the graduating class at PICS High School in the year 2018 was approximately 250 students, which were nearly 500 strong when they were freshmen. I am told that 10% of children under the age of 16 are not enrolled in school across our Nation, many of whom are girls. And we have cultural norms that often prevent us from saying out loud that our feelings and experiences are mentionable. These are real challenges, and we should face them head on, and overcome them.

“The empowerment of, and investment in girls are key in breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and in promoting and protecting the full and effective enjoyment of their human rights.” These are the words from the Resolution for the International Day of the Girl Child, and these are the words that I will focus on now.

It has been unquestionably proven by science that every country that empowers girls, such as by providing them equal rights, and invests in girls, such as ensuring they have quality education and healthcare, become stronger. As girls in the FSM, you deserve to know what your Government is doing to provide you the opportunities you need to succeed, just as you are obligated to acknowledge that the only person who defines success for you is you. Your body is your body, your life is your life, and you are the one who gets to determine what you will become. It’s the Government’s responsibility to give you the opportunities, and it’s your responsibility to make use of them. Your feelings are mentionable, and your experiences are mentionable.

In recent weeks, I have been in talks with the Pohnpei Department of Education and National Department of Education on the services that our Nation provides to our children. I am told that almost every dollar of our Education Sector funding comes from the Compact of Free Association, and that Special Education funding in particular comes from the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. I have witnessed with my own eyes classrooms in our country, and the struggles our girls have in their pursuit of their education.

While we are all very grateful to the United States for their support to our children, our girls and our boys, President Panuelo and I have agreed that it is time that our Government play a more active role in taking actions today for our girls’ prosperity tomorrow. That is why today, with the 8th Anniversary of the International Day of the Girl Child as the first event, I am honored to announce that President Panuelo and I are opening a national conversation on improving opportunities for our children, including our girls. The President and I agree that the current budget for Pohnpei and the other State’s Special Education program needs more funding to give you the opportunities you deserve. The President and I agree that the National Government funding scholarships isn’t enough when too many of our girls don’t have the opportunity to use them, and so we are committed to hearing from all of you on how you want to see the National Government play a bigger role in providing direct financial and programmatic support to our children and their education.

Girls, if there’s one thing you take away from my statement today I want it to be this: each and every one of you is amazing and unique. You being here has made today a wonderful day, just by you being you, and I like you just the way you are. Know in your heart that you are beautiful, and that

you can be whatever you want to be. It is said that girls' voices are not heard or not taken seriously but in order to be heard you must first Get Educated and Stay Educated. Know that you are a superhero in the making, because it's YOU who will define to the world what a Micronesian woman is. I am proud of you.

Thank you.