



"Navigating the World as One Micronesia"

JOINT COMMUNIQUE

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

I. INTRODUCTION

The Leaders of the governments of the CNMI, Guam, Palau, the RMI and the FSM and its states, Yap, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Chuuk, held their 23rd Micronesian Islands Forum (MIF - Formerly the Micronesia Chief Executives' Summit – MCSF) in the CNMI on April 25-27, 2018.

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 Micronesian Region.

The Honorable Ralph DLG. Torres, of the CNMI, as Chairman, expressed his appreciation to the Leaders and their jurisdictional representatives for their attendance and active participation in the 23rd Micronesian Islands Forum. The Leaders expressed their collective appreciation to Governor Torres and the People of the CNMI 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 23rd MIF Communiqué.

II. REGIONAL COMMITTEES

1. Regional Workforce Development Council (RWDC)

The RWDC reported to the Leaders that to remain competitive and to meet the challenges ahead, the region must shift from existing challenges to embrace transformative opportunities, requiring increased partnerships with



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the Pacific community – businesses, researchers, entrepreneurs, government entities, and citizens.

Some Leaders expressed serious concerns regarding the correlation between workforce training and brain drain. However, Leaders acknowledged the importance of expanding and upgrading the region's workforce and supported the Committee's recommended focus over the next year, as follows:

- The improvement, further development and investments of regional data collection;
- The continuation of the One-Stop Center Approach to Improve Partnerships with Businesses;
- Work to improve Regional Workforce Sustainability through Visa and/or Immigration Waivers for Foreign Workers, including improved and increased access to H Visas and CWs, and alignment of workforce goals with economic development;
- Continue to strengthen Education, Training, Apprenticeship and Technical Assistance Opportunities and within this context focus on program implementation; and
- Continue the 'Brain Gain and Sustain Initiative'.

2. Regional Invasive Species Council (RISC)

The RISC expressed its appreciation to Leaders for their funding of the RISC Regional Coordinator position and reported that the MIF received a response from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue, insuring that USDA-APHIS officials will continue to work with MIF jurisdictional personnel. The RISC also reported that they met in November 2017 to begin the update process of the Regional Biosecurity Plan for Micronesia and Hawaii (RBP) by setting regional priorities for the next three years. Finally, the Committee reported on new invasive species incursions since the last MIF, as follows:

- ✓ The Little Fire Ant (LFA) in Yap, Federated States of Micronesia found in August 2017;
- ✓ The Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) found in Rota, CNMI in October 2017; and



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- ✓ The Giant African Snail found in Majuro, RMI, November 2017.

The Leaders recognized the unique importance of continued and vigorous attention to the issue of Invasive Species in the Micronesian region and took the following actions:

- Endorsed the six regional priorities identified by RISC as a component of the 2018 RBP update, namely
 - Establishment of the Regional Invasive Species Coordinator position;
 - Implementation of harmonized training and requirements for Biosecurity Officers in RISC jurisdictions;
 - Addition of CRB, LFA and Black Sock Fungus with BTS as species of highest concern;
 - Establishment of an enhanced port facility on Guam for safer incoming cargo inspection and expanded pre-departure inspection to the Region;
 - Development of a comprehensive registry of invasive species in Micronesia; and
 - Creation of an Emergency Rapid Response Fund for the Region.
- Reaffirmed their financial commitment for ongoing support of RISC coordination;
- Signed a letter to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture requesting the establishment of a Micronesian Biosecurity Initiative to enable APHIS to support implementation of the RBP throughout the entire region; and
- Directed RISC and country representatives to engage with partners and other regional organizations to develop a Pacific-wide prevention and control program for CRB.

3. Pacific Islands Regional Recycling Initiative Council (PIRRIC)

The PIRRIC Committee reported that only three jurisdictions were represented at this year's meeting, Guam, the CNMI and Palau. Within this context, progress has been made in the areas beverage container recycling, enactment/enhancement of Container Deposit Laws and other Zero Waste initiatives, improvements of collection systems and schemes, closure of old landfills, extension of landfills, procurement of equipment; capacity building initiatives, construction of Convenient Centers and public outreach and education campaigns.





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Governor

RALPH DLG. TORRES
Commonwealth of the
Northern Mariana Islands
CHAIRMAN, 23rd MIF



Governor
EDDIE BAZA CALVO
Territory of Guam



President
TOMMY E. REMENGESAU, JR.
Republic of Palau

President
PETER M. CHRISTIAN
Federated States of Micronesia

President
HILDA CATHY HEINE
Republic of the Marshall Islands

Governor
MARCELO K. PETERSON
State of Pohnpei

Governor
JOHNSON ELIMO
State of Chuuk

Governor
LYNDON H. JACKSON
State of Kosrae

Governor
TONY GANNGIYAN
State of Yap

Leaders recognized the importance of solid waste management in the context of sustainable development and endorsed the Committees recommendations to:

- Move forward with last year's recommendation to establish the Regional PIRRIC Coordinator position within the Secretariat, and within that context –
 - To establish a PIRRIC Network Organization, and
 - To facilitate the development of the Scope of Work for regional recycling activities; and
- Identify funding sources to permit full participation of all jurisdictions in PIRRIC activities.

Leaders expressed concerns regarding foreign contractors that are bringing dilapidated equipment into the islands. They expressed the desire to set up a regional approach in harmonizing contracts that address these concerns and require the removal of such equipment upon the termination of the contract.

4. Regional Transportation Committee

The Regional Transportation Committee reported that due to our geographical location, air and sea transport are the two primary forms of transportation that connect our islands. Because of that, we all face common challenges with our airports and seaports.

In the area of Sea Transportation, the primary issue of concern relates to the vast distances and low volume of cargo, which results in ever-increasing costs, across the board. This issue is beyond the purview of the MSC.

In the area of Air Transportation, the major challenge is funding for projects that ensure safety for all airports, which once again relates to low passenger volume that generates insufficient revenue to provide and maintain safe and efficient airports.

Recognizing these unique air and sea transportation difficulties, the Leaders endorsed the Committee's recommendations, as follows:

- The Leaders collectively agreed that Guam not to impose any new tax and consider instead reducing transshipment charges for the benefit of



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its brother and sisters in Micronesia. Governor Calvo agreed to look into this important issue and recognized the potential for loss of stevedoring and other port operation services.

- The Leaders sent a letter to the FAA requesting the continuation of Airport Improvement Program grants for the entire region.
- The Leaders directed appropriate officials to seek available assistance from applicable U.S. Agencies to assist with the costs of training for personnel, including financial support for training offered at the Pacific Region ARFF Training Center relating to aviation safety.

Recognizing the critical need to provide air and sea transportation to all reaches our island jurisdictions, the Leaders signed resolution requesting special considerations from appropriate U.S. Government agencies for air and sea transportation services to underserved areas in Micronesia.

5. Regional Health Committee

The Regional Health Committee (RHC) reported that significant progress has been made on past MIF resolutions related to health. These include resolutions targeting non-communicable diseases (NCDs), disease surveillance, and the health workforce, especially in the realm of health data collection and surveillance. With NCD prevalence data collected, and policy strengths and weaknesses mapped, the Committee believes that it is now the right time to move into regional policy action to create stronger NCD-preventing communities.

The Committee indicated that a primary tool in achieving such communities is through the development and improvement of telehealth and telemedicine. Opportunities for telehealth use in the region are increasingly more available. If planned strategically, there are opportunities for high returns on investment through better health outcomes, reduced readmissions, and savings from reduced need for off-island referrals.

The Leaders once again recognized the critical need for all of our jurisdictions to respond to NCDs and to strengthen our respective health administrative capacities. The Leaders therefore supported the Health Committee's recommendations to:

- Hold an NCD Law and Policy Summit for the USAPIs;





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- Plan for Competitive Health Care Workforce Compensation; and
- Streamline and Strengthen Core Government Administrative Functions – and direct their respective Health Officials and Administrators to work towards their implementation.

In addition, the Leaders signed a Resolution endorsing further exploration into opportunities to enhance and expand telehealth/telemedicine delivery in the USAPIs, where feasible and appropriate to the needs and context of each USAPI location, and to support executive and legislative efforts to ensure a supportive and enabling environment that enhances and expands USAPI health agency telehealth/telemedicine initiatives.

6. Regional Tourism Committee

The Regional Tourism Committee reported on efforts to expand global awareness of the Micronesian region through marketing programs that focus on the unique attractions found only in the region. The Committee also reported on the need to create and adopt workforce development programs specifically geared towards tourism industry employees. Finally, the Committee reported on the work of PATA Micronesia to market and develop recommended marketing plans for each MIF jurisdictions and to develop a Cruise Ship industry.

The Leaders acknowledged the impact tourism plays in the economic growth of the region and supported the committee's recommendations to:

- Continue on-going efforts to establish a regional cruise industry and 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





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- 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.

7. Regional Energy Committee

The Regional Energy Committee reported that only Guam, the CNMI and Palau participated at this year's MIF due to funding restraints. The three jurisdictions discussed renewable energy projects and targets for each island, and reiterated their unique challenges, such as lack of local expertise, limited resources for large scale solar projects, and harsh weather.

The Leaders recognized these resource limitations, but stressed the importance of renewable energy to the region and supported the recommendations of the Committee to:

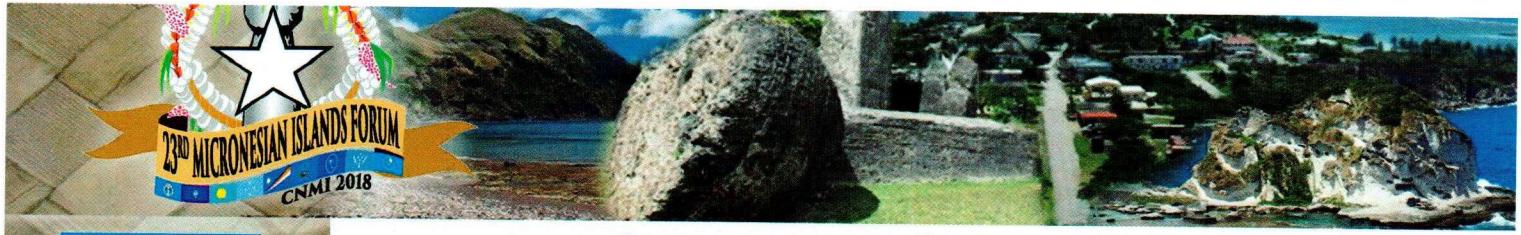
- Conduct at least three meetings a year;
- Undertake to develop net metering legislation;
- Initiate the development of legislation to encourage land conservation through building hosting of a solar grid tied system; and
- Seek increased STEM scholarship opportunities for local residents pursuing renewable energy studies.

8. Micronesia Challenge

The Micronesia Challenge (MC) Steering Committee (SC) hosted a luncheon for Leaders and reported on progress since the 22nd MIF reminding that the Leaders made a visionary commitment in 2006, to effectively conserve 30% of near-shore marine resources and 20% of terrestrial resources by 2020.

The Leaders recognized the accomplishments of each jurisdiction in moving the Micronesia Challenge forward and emphasized the importance of staying on course leading up to 2020 and beyond, while continuing to strengthen our commitments and exploring new and innovative financing strategies.





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The Leaders supported the Micronesia Challenge Plus (MC+), which will build on the success and accomplishments of the Micronesia Challenge, and pursue a collective approach to address important issues such as climate change and disaster risk reduction and management. The MC+ would further align jurisdiction's respective processes in relation to commitments made through the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

The Leaders acknowledged that 2020 is fast approaching and that it is critical that MC jurisdictions continue the original momentum towards the realization of the 2020 goals. The Leaders therefore agreed to support:

- Establishment of policy/legislative frameworks and mechanisms to help fund and support their respective protected area networks (i.e. green fees, environmental fees, etc.) and formalize annual contributions to the MC endowment fund with appropriate distribution guidelines and controls in place;
- Exploration of funding opportunities for regional projects that further support resource mobilization throughout the MC jurisdictions and investigate options for the Adaptation Fund and/or Green Climate Fund;
- Conduct a full assessment of the MC to determine a strategy moving towards 2020 and beyond; and
- Showcase the MC in regional/international forums by highlighting the achievements of the MC jurisdictions, political commitments that drove the work forward, enabling valuable partnerships, and ultimately benefiting communities across Micronesia.

9. Regional Telecommunications Committee

The Regional Telecommunications Committee stressed the importance of telecommunications to the Micronesian region, including as a technological foundation for societal communication, as an enabler for participation and development, as an enhancement to distance learning, telemedicine and the overall economic development of the islands, and as a vital piece of infrastructure for national security.

The Committee also expressed interest in working regionally in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 9, specifically, Target 9.C – focused on increasing access to information and communications technology





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and striving to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.

The Leaders agreed that telecommunications is a critical infrastructure foundation for the sustainable development of Micronesia and supported the recommendation of the Committee to undertake the following:

- Studying the regulatory frameworks in the various jurisdictions with jointly funded technical advisory support, and providing recommendations with respect to:
 - The legal framework for telecommunications in member countries,
 - Feasibility of Regulatory changes within the sector to provide collaboration between jurisdictions,
 - Options for sharing training and capacity development resources technical support,
 - Introduction of competition in the member jurisdictions, including regional telecommunications operator license(s), and
 - e-government initiatives, with support and guidance from current work in the Marianas, establish e-government goals per jurisdictions, and develop the metrics by which to measure progress, and
- Measuring regional progress in attaining Sustainable Development Goal No. 9.

III. OTHER MATTERS

1. Fisheries Management – Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WESTPAC)

Kitty Simonds, the Executive Director of WESTPAC made a presentation to the Leaders focused on the importance of fish stocks to the Micronesia and the Pacific. She recommended the support by Leaders of two resolutions related to dangers to fish stocks from climate change, and Illegal Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing activities. The Leaders endorsed both resolutions, which:

- Expressed grave concern on the effects of climate change, among them, sea level rise, shift in the distribution of tuna stocks, and diminution of fishery revenues; and



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- Committed MIF jurisdictions to combat IUU fishing activities in the Micronesian region and request funding and capacity building assistance from national and inter-governmental partners and non-governmental organizations.

2. Decolonization for Self-Governance

Governor Calvo made a presentation on the issue of self-determination and decolonization as they relate to recent efforts by the Territory of Guam to move in the direction of true self-determination.

The MIF Leaders expressed their support of Guam's efforts to achieve self-determination and agreed to assist Guam, where possible.

3. Micronesian Islands Forum Secretariat (MIFS)

The President of Palau, who currently serves as the Secretary General of the MIFS reported to Leaders regarding the development of the MIFS over the past year. President Remengesau reported the successful creation of the MIFS Office in Palau and the hiring of an Administrative Officer and anticipated hiring of a RISC Coordinator. The President also reported on the meeting of the MIF Designated Representatives and their successful review and adoption of the Interim Rules of Procedure for the MIF. The Leaders further agreed to establish an agreement of a legal foundation for the MIF. Finally, the President reported that, for the first time, jurisdictions are paying annual dues to fund the Secretariat and requested that jurisdictions that have not yet paid their dues to do so by the end of May 2018.

4. Economic Viability in Micronesia

A presentation was given on the economic viability in Micronesia, focusing on the example of Saipan over the past decade. The presentation recognized that, due to a competitive disadvantage in terms of land mass, small populations, small economies, distance from markets, and the like, the definition of progress needs to be reassessed, focusing on criteria other than wealth, such as quality of life. Additional effort must be given to enhancing political action and maximizing foreign investment. Ultimately, the presentation stressed four pillars: developing foundations to meet identified metrics, understanding what matters to us, strengthening regional cooperation and reinvestment into further progress. Ultimately, the report concluded that Micronesia must define its own economic reality. Leaders thanked Governor Torres for initiating the presentation and commented that an additional factor in our economic





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development is the factor of external shocks, such as typhoons and international trade relationships. They also commented on factors such as labor and financing availability as defined by outside sources and factors.

5. Transnational Crime Unit

President Heine reported the successful creation of the Transnational Crime Unit by the Presidents of Palau, the FSM and the RMI, the members of the Micronesia Presidents' Summit.

6. Climate Change

The Bank of Guam provided a report to the Leaders on the issue of Climate Change and the potential impacts of Global Warming over the next century. The report indicated that continuation of the current pattern of energy use will soon take the planet past the point of no return. But the report recognized a number of local initiatives that can impact this ultimate impact and encouraged even stronger island initiatives to build resilience and to prepare our islands for the future.

Leaders indicated the existence of Climate Change is no longer in question, at least for island jurisdictions. They indicated that countries must continue to expand their ambitions and seek net zero emissions by 2050 and not lose sight of a global increase in temperature of no more than 1.5 degrees as a continuing goal that can save low lying islands like the RMI. Marine Protected Areas continue to be an essential tool in combatting Climate Change, and services as the Islands' contribution to the war against greenhouse gasses.

Leaders signed a resolution recognizing that they have a role to facilitate and enhance further actions critical to staying within the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit

7. Building Relationships with the Pacific US Territories and the Freely Associated States

The Assistant Secretary of the Office of Insular Affairs expressed his willingness to aid in ending the punitive treatment of U.S. territories through laws that inadvertently hurt the islands. He committed to continue working for the transition of the Compacts of Free Association to keep our relations strong. "We will build bridges to solve many problems that confront your islands."





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8. Education Committee

The Leaders agreed to create a Standing Education Committee. This is line with recent recommendations from the RWDC and the RHC.

IV. CLOSING

1. Governor Eddie B. Calvo.

The Leaders recognized the many years of service by Governor Calvo to the MIF and to the Region and presented him with a departing gift.

2. Venue.

The Leaders welcomed Chuuk's offer to host the 24th MIF in June/July of 2019.

3. Closing Remarks.

The Leaders all expressed their gratitude to the CNMI for hosting the 23rd MIF and reaffirmed their commitment to their continuing partnership in the region.



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