

FSM Supreme Court throws out criminal “quarantine” case against Pohnpei State officials

By [Bill Jaynes](#)
The Kaselehlie Press

March 21, 2023

Palikir, Pohnpei, FSM—Today, FSM Supreme Court Associate Justice Larry Wentworth issued a ruling dismissing all criminal charges (CC 2022-502) against Pohnpei State employees, including Christina Elnei, who at the time of the alleged actions was serving as Pohnpei’s Acting Governor. All of the now-dismissed charges were associated with quarantine actions taken by the officials after a repatriation flight arrived from Guam on June 12, 2022. (See Kaselehlie Press coverage of initial arrests in the [June 22, 2022 issue](#)).

In addition to the then acting Governor,



the FSM National Government filed the criminal charges against Norleen Oliver Deorio, who managed Pohnpei’s COVID-19 Task Force; Patrick Carl, the Director of the Department of Public Safety; Peterson Sam, Commissioner of

Pohnpei State Radio V6AH, and Patrick Pedrus, Pohnpei’s Public Information Officer.

“This case was the result of misplaced hopes”, today’s Court Ruling concluded.

“Pohnpei COVID officials were hoping that the June 11-12, 2022 repatriation flight would either be postponed to the June 15th flight from Guam when

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Proposed FSM resolution would exercise Congressional mandate for oversight of FSM Foreign Affairs

By [Bill Jaynes](#)
The Kaselehlie Press

March 15, 2023

FSM—On March 15, 2023, outgoing Senator Ferny S. Perman introduced a proposed resolution for Congress to consider at its upcoming special session that will begin on April 3. The introduced resolution, if passed, would make a formal “request” for President David W. Panuelo to brief Congress on all foreign affairs matters and officially “ask” him not to make any changes to the FSM’s diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China at this time.

One of the many roles of the FSM Congress is to serve as a check and balance to the Executive Branch’s actions. Its Foreign Affairs Standing Committee, chaired by Senator Paliknoa Welly of Kosrae, has an oversight function that helps keep the Executive Branch from taking unilateral actions in that regard.

If passed, the resolution, while strictly speaking would not be legally necessary in order for Congress to conduct its oversight role, would send a clear message that Congress will not roll over and let the President make changes in its diplomatic relations without first clearing it after lengthy, and thorough Congressional

analysis. The wording of the proposed resolution makes it clear that Congress does not currently support any changes.

The resolution was introduced five days after President Panuelo sent a letter to the FSM’s top elected representatives in National and State Governments. Though the letter was to have been a private communication, it leaked to one U.S.-based journalist, who then posted it on her LinkedIn page and later wrote a news article about its contents. International news outlets picked the story up quickly, and by the end of March 11, the accusations the President had made internally regarding Chinese actions in the FSM were a matter

of international attention and sometimes wild speculation. (See previous KPress coverage here)

On May 30, President Panuelo wrote another letter to the leaders of all Pacific Island Countries (PICs), a letter that also leaked immediately. The letter warned the PICs leaders of potential nefarious intentions of China’s proposed China-Pacific Island Countries Development Vision plan. After that letter became public, members of the FSM Congress met with the President, outraged that he had potentially damaged the relations between

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FSM Justice Department accuses finance employee of theft of \$215,977.70 from FSM Government

By Bill Jaynes
The Kaselehlie Press

March 28, 2023

FSM—Sometime on the afternoon of March 23, National Police Officers arrested FSM Finance Department Employee Sylvia Edward (sometimes spelled Silvia Edward) on suspicion of multiple crimes surrounding the embezzlement of \$215,977.70 from the National Government. On March 24, the FSM Department of Justice filed its criminal information against her.

The 359-page document contained 414 separate crimes under the two names that seem to apply to the same person. “Defendants violated the Financial Management Act, the Financial Management Regulations, and Title 11, including, but not limited to...” Conflict of Interest, Theft, Criminal Mischief, Unauthorized Possession or Removal of Property, Benefiting from the Proceeds of a serious offense, Money Laundering, and Unsworn Falsification to Authorities. The crimes are alleged to have occurred between around January 2020 to around February 2023.

“It is believed that Ms. Edward used her position within the department of finance to manipulate the administrative procedures set in place and procured checks for her own personal use and gain,” the affidavit of probable cause by one of the investigating officers said. “The conduct of Ms. Edward, which resulted in the government checks being issued were all under false pretense and not

authorized.”

The case came to the attention of the Criminal Investigation Division on March 15, 2023, after the FSM Department of Justice received a referral letter from the Secretary of Finance and Administration to look into a possible Fraud and Embezzlement case involving one of their employees.

“According to the internal investigation, Silvia Edward manipulated the standard operating procedures to create checks by generating her own requests for unauthorized checks, which resulted in numerous unauthorized checks issued to the following names of individuals and businesses listed below,” the probable cause affidavit said.

The affidavit supplied specific check amounts and the names of the people who received the unauthorized checks. They listed a total of \$92,598.94 issued to Dwight Edward for listed purposes ranging from contractual obligations, travel expenses, reimbursement, to none at all. Sylvia Edward received \$77,455 in checks. Sylvia Eas received \$4,606. \$16,050 worth of checks were issued to Jordan Panuel. Naimy Edward received \$700. Meleleen Edward received \$500 purportedly for a medical referral as did Hannalia Manuel. Nickontro Johnny received \$1,700. Depster Paul received \$1,550. Fuji Enterprises received \$16,200 for the purchase of two vehicles. Village Travel received \$2,333.83. FSM Telecommunications Corporation

received \$1,129 for the purchase of a Samsung cell phone, and Micro PC received \$654.94 for a laptop.

As part of their investigation, National Police officers interviewed Rosihna R. Silbanuz, Department of Finance Accounts Payable Manager, who told them that on March 7, 2023, her office discovered that Silvia Edward had “made an unauthorized check under her name”.

“Rosihna R Silbanuz explained to investigators the procedure for printing checks,” the affidavit said.

“According to Mrs. Silbanuz’s explanation, the front desk secretary will document the check request in an accounting log sheet. The request will then go to the compliance division for review and documentation. Next, the request will go to the certification division for review and documentation. The check request will then go to accounts payable to be reviewed and documented, and finally the request is given to Erick Paul for final approval. After his approval, the check request is given back to accounts payable and then sent to IT to print. After the check is printed, it is given to accounts payable and attached to the supporting documentation, then the check is given to the Treasury to distribute.”

The investigators also met with other staff members of the finance department and identified many other unauthorized checks that had been processed and printed by Silvia Edward (totals listed above).

Sylvia or Silvia Edward is innocent unless it is proven in court that she broke laws, and other than the initial filing of the 414 charges, that process has not yet begun.



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Bill Jaynes
Managing Editor

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THE KASELEHLIE PRESS
WILL BE RELEASED ON:**

April 12, 2023

**Deadline for submission of articles or
advertisements for this issue is the end
of working hours on:**

Monday, April 10, 2023

FSM Court sentence Jano and Weilbacher for crimes related to fraudulent vessel scheme

By **Bill Jaynes**
The Kaselehlie Press

March 21, 2023

FSM—The FSM Supreme Court today sentenced Attorney Martin Jano and Former FSM Secretary for Transportation, Communications, and Infrastructure Lukner Weilbacher for crimes related to a fraudulent vessel licensing scheme. (See conviction coverage in the [February 1, 2023 issue of The Kaselehlie Press](#))

Lukner Weilbacher had been convicted

on January 17, 2023 for the crime of Conflict of Interest for his role in the scheme. Today the Court committed him to jail for 20 months but suspended that sentence, and he will be on probation for that period of time beginning today. He will not be allowed to leave Pohnpei without the court’s permission and must report to State Justice Ombudsman Brenson Penias every two months or as directed by the state justice ombudsman.

Martin Jano also had been convicted for his role in the scheme of the crime of Money Laundering and Conspiracy.

The Court suspended all but 10 days of a three-year jail sentence and placed him on probation during the three-year period. He also must pay a fine of \$8,000, which must pay in installments of not less than \$250 a month. He also must report to the State Justice Ombudsman Brenson Penias on a monthly basis. He was also sentenced to community service by providing pro bono legal services to at least six indigent Pohnpei residents each year of the three-year period, and he must provide evidence of that service to the Ombudsman.

Jano will serve weekends between April 28 and May 22 at the Pohnpei State Jail.

Both are barred from applying for a passport under any name and must obey all laws and ordinances. Their passports will be returned to them after completion of their sentences. If they violate the terms of the suspended sentences, prosecutors may ask that some or all of the suspension be revoked, which would mean their sentence would have to be served in jail.

New PUC waste heat power generation units will produce clean zero carbon energy for Pohnpei



By **Bill Jaynes**
The Kaselehlie Press

March 24, 2023

Pohnpei—Pohnpei’s Governor Reed Oliver, Pohnpei Utilities Corporation (PUC) officials and employees, and a representative of the United States Embassy to FSM gathered for the handover of a new 200kW ORC (Organic Racine Cycle) Waste Heat Power Generation Unit. The \$2,942,790 project was primarily funded by a United States Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service High Energy Cost grant in the amount of \$2,929,600. PUC contributed \$30,000 to the project.

of their own. The new ORC systems will not only cool the new powerful and more efficient generators that are currently on their way to Pohnpei, but the energy from the heat will be used to provide electricity with zero carbon dioxide power and requiring no fuel. PUC says that approximately 1500 tons of CO2 will not be added to the atmosphere each year through the use of the additional systems. The technology will also improve the cooling of the diesel engines resulting in improved efficiency.

The units are compact in design and have been specially containerized according to the PUC’s need. The design means that the generators have a footprint of only 100 square meters. PUC says, additionally, at a cost of only 25 cents per kilowatt hour, the average savings per year will be approximately \$550,000.



PUC awarded the contract for three of the generators to B:Power, an engineering company founded in 2009 in the Czech Republic. B:Power cooperates with the leading manufacturers of ORC units from the USA, Germany, and the Netherlands. In the case of the PUC project, that manufacturer was ElectraTherm, Inc., which is based in Germany.

“It has taken almost four years since the first meeting with representatives of Pohnpei Utilities Corporation, where the concept of ORC-based waste heat to power generation was presented until the award of the contract,” the information sheet on the project said. “The project was originally scheduled to be completed by June 30, 2021, but unfortunately, the advent of COVID-19 made the planned date impossible to achieve. Currently, all equipment has been delivered to the installation site with the B:POWER technicians awaiting the issue of a permit to enter the country to complete installation and commissioning of the ORCs.”

Essentially, an ORC Waste Heat Power Generation Unit uses heat such as that produced by PUC’s generators to produce power. The new systems will completely replace the radiators that PUC currently uses to cool its generators that are currently at the end of their life cycle and produce no energy

...Quarantine case

Continued from front page

both the EMU and the MMA would be cleaned and available or that the June 12th flight would be limited to only 38 passengers, for which the EMU could be made ready to accommodate. And the national covid officials were hoping that the MMA would be cleaned and made ready for the 71 passengers that had been quarantined at its expense on Guam for three days. In what may have been an ill-advised contest of wills, neither's hopes were realized.

"Accordingly, the Counts 1-94 and 119-223 are all dismissed with prejudice. This case is closed." The initial filing did not include counts 95-118, so today's ruling dispatched all of the criminal charges against the defendants.

On June 12, 72 passengers who had been quarantined for three days in Guam and that the FSM had cleared to return to Pohnpei on a repatriation flight arrived. At that time, Pohnpei had 26 rooms available at the Emergency Medical Unit (EMU) on the site of the China Star Hotel, and 40 rooms at the Medical Monitoring Area (MMA). While FSM President Panuelo, who had been on the flight, was allowed to return home for quarantine, the 71 other passengers were transported from the airport to the EMU. Pohnpei quarantine personnel found room accommodations for all but 24 people at the EMU. Because the MMA facility had, until that day, still housed two passengers from the previous repatriation flight who had tested positive for COVID-19 while in Pohnpei quarantine, the passengers without quarantine accommodation were not taken to the MMA. Before the MMA could house any more arrivals, it had to be cleaned according to protocol by a trained quarantine crew.

The passengers without rooms were temporarily assigned to bunk in the China Star Lobby and restaurant areas, where most were given pillows, blankets, and mattresses, and slept on those or on the furniture. They were not always spaced six feet apart and had to share toilets and showers.

The last two MMA residents were released from quarantine on June 11, and the trained quarantine personnel then were able to properly clean and decontaminate that facility. The 24 passengers without rooms then were

assigned to the MMA facility by 9:00 PM on June 12. All arrivals were then kept in Pohnpei quarantine for seven days and then released.

Dismissal of Counts 1-24—Conspiracy to violate civil rights of 24 people

Prosecutors alleged that by holding 24 people in quarantine for seven days instead of the five days as set out in the President's "Emergency Regulation to Clarify the Maximum Period of Quarantine Upon Arrival in FSM". The Court ruled that the changed regulations of the National Government were released on June 14, two days after the arrival of the passengers in Pohnpei. As such they could not have conspired to violate a changed policy that did not yet exist.

The Court said that the national government does have the right to set nationwide standards as a condition of entry and of public health. However, according to the FSM Constitution, the national government has the power "to promote education and health by setting minimum standards". The Court ruled that the States have the power, based on local conditions, to set more stringent standards if warranted.

The national government said that "the defendants conspired to commit these charged crimes "by extending the period of quarantine from 5 to 7 days, both, without lawful purpose or medical reasons, in violation of false imprisonment." Prosecutors then needed to prove that there were no medical reasons for the extra two days of quarantine. "But Pohnpei COVID officials did have a medical reason - the ten days' quarantine recommended by the U.S. CDC, and their previous experience of arrivals testing negative before leaving Guam quarantine and later testing positive while in Pohnpei quarantine," the Court explained.

"The court therefore cannot conclude that Counts 1-24 allege or charge any crimes. Accordingly, Counts 1-24 are dismissed with prejudice," it ruled. "With prejudice" in a court's ruling means that the alleged charges are dispensed with completely and may not be refiled against the defendants in any manner.

Counts 25-94—Violation of Civil Rights

Counts 25-94 accuse the defendants of violating each of the 71 arriving passengers' civil rights by "intentionally and maliciously disabling the MMA

by not making expeditious preparation for its use as a quarantine facility" thus leaving each arriving passenger in unsafe conditions at the EMU and by extending the Pohnpei quarantine period from five to seven days."

The court ruled that the defendants had committed no crime by adhering to the seven-day Pohnpei quarantine because they had medical reasons to do so, and therefore had the power to take its actions.

The court could also find no evidence of "maliciousness". Prosecutors had argued that the fact that she waited until June 8 at the instruction of the acting Governor to request that the flight be postponed until the 15th showed ill intent. The defendants had known about the scheduled flight for some time, but they did not know until June 8 that two passengers from the previous flight would still test positive and would therefore need to remain in the MMA quarantine until June 11.

FSM offered to provide personnel to help clean the MMA facility in time, but that would have involved the use of national government personnel who had not been trained in the COVID cleaning protocol. Having that happen would violate the June 1, 2022 standard operating procedure saying that "[a]fter the quarantine site is cleared [of quarantined individuals], the Hazmat team will perform decontamination in all the rooms and areas used for quarantine." The court could therefore find no probable cause for the defendants' failure to take up the national government's office and dismissed counts 25-94, also with prejudice.

Counts 120-223—Civil rights violations by not complying with Quarantine Standard Operating Procedures

Prosecutors charged the defendants with civil rights violations because when all 71 passengers arrived and were transported to the EMU and none to the MMA, all were crowded together for orientation and room assignment, and later, others were forced to stay in a common area using the same facilities. It did not allow for the standard of a minimum six-foot distance between people.

"Ironically, these counts charge that the defendants did not do enough quarantining, while Counts 1-94 charge the defendants with doing too much (that is, an extra two days) quarantining," the ruling said.

The Court noted that the passengers were not uniformly kept over six feet apart when going to the Guam airport, when going through the Guam airport, and boarding the repatriation flight. The six-foot distance was not maintained when the passengers were seated on the United aircraft during the flight nor when bussed to the Pohnpei quarantine site. "Nor were they expected to," the court said. They also shared toilet facilities in the Guam airport and aboard the aircraft.

"While the Pohnpei covid officials were unable to ensure that everyone maintained a six-foot distance between them and the next person while in the EMU lobby and restaurant areas, they appear to have tried their best. And they did move those accommodated in the lobby and restaurant areas to the MMA quarantine facility as soon as it was properly decontaminated on June 12, 2022, by Pohnpei's trained cleaning crew according to protocol," the ruling said.

The court also said that the most important function of quarantine, keeping arriving passengers from contacting the general public, was maintained. It found no evidence that any of the passengers ever came into contact with anyone in the general public. "The Pohnpei COVID officials' adherence to their protocols prevented that from being a possibility with the passengers arriving on the June 11-12, 2022 repatriation flight." The court also dismissed counts 120-223.

Count 119—DeOrio obstructed a public official from the discharge of her duties

Prosecutors charged that when Norleen DeOrio instructed Quarantine Manager, Marcy Lorrin to stop cleaning the MMA, it amounted to obstruction of a public official from the discharge of her duties, which is a crime.

The court explained that even if DeOrio interfered with, delayed, or obstructed Lorrin from doing her duties, it would not be a national crime because Lorrin is not a "public official" as legally defined. Lorrin was a Pohnpei State employee who served under DeOrio and is not a national government official.

"Furthermore, the testimony before the court was that Lorrin was told to stop cleaning the MMA so that the EMU could be cleaned and would be ready for the repatriation flight that was going to arrive that evening," the Court said and also dismissed Count 119, the last of all of the charges.

ADB Office for the FSM, Palau, & Marshall Islands Opens in Pohnpei State; President Panuelo & Vice President Palik Receive ADB Pacific Director General Leah Gutierrez

FSM Information Services

March 20, 2023

PALIKIR, Pohnpei—On March 20th, 2023, His Excellency David W. Panuelo—President of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)—and the Honorable Aren B. Palik, Vice President of the FSM, received the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Director General for the Pacific, Leah Gutierrez, in a courtesy call. Following the meeting, President Panuelo sojourned to the ADB office located at the One World Plaza complex in Kolonia, Pohnpei State, for the ribbon cutting ceremony. The ADB office physically located in Pohnpei serves the FSM, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.



Pictured Above: ADB Director General for the Pacific, Leah Gutierrez; H.E. David W. Panuelo



Pictured Above: T.H. Aren B. Palik, Vice President of the FSM; Leah Gutierrez, ADB Director General for the Pacific; H.E. David W. Panuelo, President of the FSM; T.H. Eugene Amor, Secretary of Finance & Administration

At present, the ongoing portfolio of ADB development support includes \$25.3 million dollars (\$25,300,000). The ADB provides support to the FSM through strategic investments in energy, water, transportation, education, and technical assistance.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the ADB provided generous grant assistance of \$26.5 million dollars (\$26,500,000) in areas such as the Nation’s first social protection programs, and mitigating impacts in the health and tourism sectors, among others.

“ADB is an important development partner,” President Panuelo said in his statement at the opening of the ADB office, “ADB understands that, as a Small Island Developing State, our country experiences heightened barriers to inclusive economic growth,



Pictured Above: H.E. David W. Panuelo, President of the FSM; Leah Gutierrez, ADB Director General for the Pacific; and T.H. Christina Elnei, Director of Treasury & Administration for Pohnpei State Government

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due to our geographic remoteness, small population, capacity constraints, and exposure to natural hazards, of which the latter is intensifying due to the growing pressures of Climate Change.... The ADB’s understanding of our uniqueness, and our vulnerabilities, has promoted a strong partnership with our country.”

During the courtesy call between President Panuelo, Vice President Palik, and Director General Gutierrez, the discussions focused primarily on ADB’s historical and ongoing assistance to the FSM. The Director General described that eight members of ADB’s Board will convene a meeting in Chuuk State in the last week of March, 2023, and described to President Panuelo and Vice President Palik how ADB can also assist in private sector development presuming that that would be of interest to the FSM.

President Panuelo and Vice President Palik thanked Director General Gutierrez

for ADB’s friendship and support to the FSM, noting that while they cannot foretell the next administration’s policies that it has been a policy of the Panuelo-Palik administration to focus exclusively on receiving grants, not loans, from any and all friends, allies, and development partners and for any purpose.

Citizens may recall President Panuelo describing the forthcoming opening of the ADB Pacific Country Office in the State of the Nation address this past January, 2023, which—in addition to the forthcoming World Bank office, and the forthcoming expansion of the United Nations Multi-Country Office for the Micronesian subregion—is a part of the FSM becoming a North Pacific hub.

The FSM appreciates ADB’s friendship and development support to our Nation, which has deeply positive impacts on the FSM’s citizens and communities.

...Mandate

Continued from front page

the FSM and China, telling him that China gives the FSM a lot of money, an issue that President Panuelo also covered in his letter of March 10 to FSM's elected officials.

According to a source within the FSM government who asked not to be named, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China to the FSM has not had contact with President Panuelo regarding the contents of his now widely publicized letter. The FSM government did, however, receive a diplomatic note "informing" them that Qian Bo, the PRC's newly appointed special envoy to the Pacific and specifically named in the President's March 10 letter, would be arriving in the FSM and would be staying until May. The newly elected Congress will select the next FSM President in May. The FSM has reportedly denied the entry.

Senator Perman's opening paragraph in the resolution, by way of background to the proposed Congressional mandate, makes it clear that the FSM Congress is aware of the FSM's unique position as a Pacific island nation with "economic, geographic, political and environmental significance."

The proposed resolution serves to give notice that the FSM Congress intends to exercise its legal mandate for oversight of Foreign Affairs and ultimately, its power to ratify or deny any treaties with other nations. Congress does not intend to switch the FSM's diplomatic relations to Taiwan without a serious analysis of the matter.

"...while it has a small population and modest incomes compared to many of its large neighbors, it

is important to those neighbors, and that our Nation's leadership has always striven to protect our culture and tradition, and independence, as well as, the best interests of its citizens since the founding of the Nation in 1979." He says those goals have partly been accomplished by the FSM's declaring its primary foreign policies to all nations that it is a "friend to all and an enemy of none".

Though, like other Pacific nations, the FSM's foreign policy is based on the idea of being a "friend to all and an enemy of none," the FSM has at least on one other occasion acted with its conscience in terms of Foreign Affairs. In February of 2022, the FSM severed diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation after its invasion of Ukraine. "It is often described that the preference of any Pacific Island Country, to include the FSM, is that we be friends to all, and enemies to none," President Panuelo said at that time. "This indeed and truly remains the cornerstone of our Nation's foreign policy. But values and convictions must matter more than not at all, and as this Paradise in Our Backyards is founded on our Micronesian ideals of peace, unity, and liberty, so too do we advocate for these ideals to be shared and spread."

As one of his first points in his March 10 letter to FSM elected representatives, the President pointed to intelligence that showed that China may be preparing for an invasion of Taiwan. He wrote that he has always sought to uphold the FSM's foreign policy main principle, which he called "elegant in its simplicity and inspirational in its decency. There is, however, a weakness-a vulnerability, if you will - in our foreign policy as described above, my dear Speaker and

Leaders," the President continued. "Our foreign policy assumes that those we encounter have good intentions and mean us well, and that other countries are either friends we haven't yet met or friends we've established meaningful partnerships with. I should emphasize that, on the whole, this is the right attitude for us to take, as it is noble in heart. But it also presents an opening that, if not watched for, and if not managed, could allow the sovereignty that we jealously guard to chip away before our own eyes. I believe that our values are presently being used against us, as Micronesians, and against our national interest, by persons who would, and who do, seek to use us so as to achieve a larger objective of their own."

The background of the proposed resolution from Congress goes on to remind the President that the FSM's national policies were arrived upon only after "significant study and review by a broad group of government leaders" both on the National

and State levels. It says that process increased the Nation's participation in global and regional organizations, an increase in development aid, training and education, funding in infrastructure, health and education, and many other benefits. "...but equally important, it has led to security, peace and stability."

"...our Nation's diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China is an example of hard work, consultation and study by our Department of Foreign Affairs, in conjunction with consultation with a broad segment of our National and State Government leadership, and it has produced a diplomatic relationship with the People's Republic of China that has significantly benefited the Federated States of Micronesia."

The resolution, if passed, would reiterate to the President and to the people of the FSM that the "One China Policy" is the official policy of the FSM.

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CFE Organizes World Water Day Event

On March 22, 2023, in commemoration of World Water Day, interns from the Center for Entrepreneurship (CFE) UNICEF collaborated with the Australian Embassy, UNICEF, and DOE to organize an event centered around this year's theme of "Accelerating change to solve the water and sanitation crisis". In preparation for the event, the interns visited 11 schools to educate the various WASH clubs on how to utilize the kits and interpret their results.

The event was centered on the assessment results of WASH club schools' respective water sources. Notably, guests from the diplomatic corps and various government offices were enlightened on water quality from sources around Pohnpei.

The successful outcome of the event is attributed to the interns' exemplary leadership, communication, marketing, and management skills. The Center is immensely grateful to its partners, which include the Australian Embassy, IOM, MP, and DECEM, for their valuable contribution of games and prizes. The Center also extends appreciation to all participating schools for their active participation.

Happy World Water Day to all!



Above: COM-FSM President Dr. Theresa Koroivulaono speaks to the crowd during the world Water Day event at the National Campus.

Below: COM-FSM Students participates on the activities at the WWD event.



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BANKGUAM HOLDING COMPANY AND SUBSIDIARIES

UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF CONDITION

(Year ended December 31, 2022; in 000's US Dollars)

Assets		Liabilities and Stockholders' Equity	
Cash and due from banks	\$ 31,152	Deposits:	
Interest bearing deposits in banks	160,789	Noninterest bearing	\$ 850,480
Total cash and cash equivalents	191,941	Interest bearing	1,497,217
Restricted cash	150	Total deposits	2,347,697
Investment securities available-for-sale, at fair value	501,899	Accrued interest payable	30
Investment securities held-to-maturity, at amortized cost	318,674	Subordinated debt, net	34,469
Federal Home Loan Bank stock, at cost	3,318	Other liabilities	47,475
Loans, net of allowance for loan losses	1,379,613	Total Liabilities	2,429,671
Accrued interest receivable	7,613	Commitments and contingencies	
Premises and equipment, net	19,396	Stockholders' equity:	
Goodwill	13,014	Common stock	2,034
Intangible assets	9,980	Preferred stock	980
Other assets	116,526	Additional paid-in capital, Common stock	24,989
Total Assets	\$ 2,562,124	Additional paid-in capital, Preferred stock	8,803
		Retained earnings	168,193
		Accumulated other comprehensive loss	(70,408)
		Non-controlling interest	7,220
		Common stock in treasury, at cost	(9,358)
		Total stockholders' equity	132,453
		Total Liabilities and Stockholders' Equity	\$ 2,562,124

UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF INCOME

(Year ended December 31, 2022; in 000's US Dollars)

Interest income	\$ 93,187
Interest expense	2,058
Net interest income	91,129
Provision for loan losses	5,700
Net interest income, after provision for loan losses	85,429
Non-interest income	34,204
Non-interest expense	96,475
Income before income taxes	23,158
Income tax expense	3,479
Net Income	\$ 19,679

BANK OF GUAM

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA BRANCHES

STATEMENT OF CONDITION

(Year ended December 31, 2022; in 000's US Dollars)

Assets		Liabilities and Stockholders' Equity	
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 2,058	Deposits:	
Loans, net of allowance for loan losses	22,495	Non-interest bearing	\$ 80,817
Premises and equipment, net	408	Interest bearing	153,760
Accrued interest receivable	39	Total deposits	234,577
Other assets	1,109	Accrued interest payable	1
Due from the Parent	209,763	Other liabilities	1,294
Total Assets	\$ 235,872	Total Liabilities	\$ 235,872

STATEMENT OF INCOME

(Year ended December 31, 2022; in 000's US Dollars)

Interest income	\$ 6,207
Interest expense	18
Net interest income	6,189
Provision for loan losses	360
Net interest income, after provision for loan losses	5,829
Non-interest income	1,423
Non-interest expense	2,027
Net Income	\$ 5,225



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FSM Pohnpei Fuel Subsidy applies only to residential PUC customer cash power rates

By [Bill Jaynes](#)
The Kaselehlie Press

March 27, 2023

Pohnpei—Since FSM fuel subsidy money started flowing for Pohnpei Utility customers (FSM Public Law 22-139), cash power rates have declined significantly, but only for residential users, and the decrease is only temporary while the subsidy is in place. PUC calculates cash power rates and makes changes on the 15th of each month. Initially, the price decrease for residential customers was negligible because the FSM provided subsidy that is paid to FSM Petroleum Corporation had only affected a few days of the previous months' activity. But as of February 15, residential customers were paying only 32 cents per kilowatt hour of cash power. Government and Commercial customers are still paying a much higher rate at 50 cents per kilowatt hour which is approximately seven cents lower than the rate was before the effects of the subsidy started to figure into PUC's calculations.

Before the Fuel Subsidy law came into effect and the money finally started flowing, residential, commercial, and government customers may not even have been aware that there was a differential cash power rate as both classes of customers paid essentially the same rate for standard power service. Many commercial customers were surprised to discover that there is a difference indeed as the cash power rate for residential customers dropped significantly, but little change was made in the rate for businesses and the government. PUC Chief Financial Officer Daisy Nanpei explained that the Fuel Subsidy applies only to residential customers, and currently, those customers are paying .1784 cents less per unit of power than businesses do.

“On PUC's part on the Fuel Subsidy Savings Program, on a monthly basis, FSM Petroleum Corporation or Vital sells fuel to PUC with a savings rate per gallon,” Nanpei explained. “Savings rates depend on how much subsidy is given to FSM Petroleum Corporation through the subsidy savings program

that is passed from the FSM National Government. PUC, in turn, takes the savings amount and calculates the savings that should be applied per kilo Watt hour (kWh). The savings calculated is what the residential customers are saving on a per kWh basis...Whatever amount of savings given to PUC through the fuel Subsidy Savings Program, PUC will pass on to the Residential Customers until we break even between savings received from FSM Petroleum Corporation and savings passed on to Residential Customers.”

Some PUC customers who rent apartments were surprised that the rate didn't apply to them. One customer reported that he waited until the 15th of the first month in which the price was supposed to have dropped and then bought several hundred dollars of power at once. He was stunned that the price had only decreased by a small fraction and discovered that was because PUC classified the account connected to his apartment as commercial.

“Customers are classified according

to what was originally on the service applications,” Nanpei said. “All customers who are renting apartments, if you see that you are classified as commercial, please visit our Finance Department and identify your account so we can change your status to residential.”

In previous coverage of the effect of the fuel subsidy on PUC cash power prices, CEO Nixon Anson had told the Kaselehlie Press (see [January 18, 2023 issue of The Kaselehlie Press](#)) that the first noticeable decrease in cash power rates would occur at midnight, the morning of February 15. Though those rates did change significantly on February 15, the decrease was not reflected on the PUC website, where customers can buy cash power using a credit or debit card. Anson later explained that the person in charge of the website had been off island for a conference, so the website did not change promptly. That matter was resolved within a few days, but the rate could be realized by buying cash power in person.

Two FSM citizens sentenced for human trafficking crimes in the United States

By [Bill Jaynes](#)
The Kaselehlie Press
From US Department of Justice press release

March 20, 2023

Ottumwa, Iowa—The United States government has successfully prosecuted two FSM citizens for Human Trafficking crimes and today sentenced them to 48 months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release. They are also ordered to pay nearly \$70,000 in restitution to the victims from whom they withheld passports in order to coerce their labor in a meat processing plant.

According to the US Department of Justice, in October of 2022, Nesly Mwaracheon, 46, and Bertino Weires, 51 pleaded guilty to two counts of unlawful conduct with respect to documents in furtherance of trafficking of forced labor. (see coverage of the plea in the [October 12, 2022 issue of The Kaselehlie Press](#) on page 2) The

charges were for recruiting two young men from Udot, Chuuk, FSM to come to the United States for the purpose of coercing the labor in a meat processing plant for the defendants' financial gain.

According to court documents, the defendants convinced the two victims to leave their homes in Micronesia in December 2019 and travel to the United States by promising them they could work in the United States and send money back to their families. Once in the United States, the defendants confiscated the victims' passports and obtained jobs for them at a meat processing plant in Ottumwa, Iowa. Each week the defendants took the victims to cash their paychecks before seizing almost the entire amount and leaving the victims with a nominal amount each week. The defendants used various means to compel the victims' labor and services, including confiscating the victims' passports and social security cards, imposing debts on them, limiting and monitoring their

communication with family, physically and socially isolating them, and creating a system of total financial dependence on the defendants. In so doing, the defendants created a situation where the victims either had to continue complying with the defendants' demands or risk being homeless and without a means of supporting themselves in a foreign country where they did not speak the language and had no means of returning home.

“These defendants used the promise of well-paid jobs to lure the victims to come to the United States in search of a better future for themselves and their families,” said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. “These defendants then proceeded to callously exploit the victims, using their power over them to profit off their hard work. The Department of Justice remains committed to seeking justice for survivors of forced labor schemes, holding perpetrators accountable and

stripping wrongdoers of their illegal profits.”

“Forced labor can happen anywhere in the United States, including Iowa. We will continue fighting for victims to ensure those who exploit the promise of working in the United States to coerce labor are held accountable,” said U.S. Attorney Richard D. Westphal for the Southern District of Iowa. “Thanks to the diligent work of law enforcement, these acts of coercion and compulsion were stopped.”

Investigator Jeremy Tosh of the Ottumwa Police Department investigated the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Virginia Bruner and Ryan Leemkuil for the Southern District of Iowa and Trial Attorney Christina Randall-James of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit prosecuted the case.

President Panuelo amends executive order establishing the Public Education Task Force on the proposed Constitutional Amendments adopted by the 4th FSM Constitutional Convention

FSM Information Services

March 23, 2023

PALIKIR, Pohnpei—On March 23rd, 2023, His Excellency David W. Panuelo, President of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), announced the amendment of the Executive Order establishing the public education task force on the proposed constitutional amendments adopted by the 4th FSM Constitutional Convention.

The Executive Order, which was signed March 17th 2023, speaks to the recent courtesy resignations by the Chair and Vice Chair and amends the Executive Order so as to fill the vacant positions.

The Chair of the Public Education Task Force is His Majesty, Iso Nahnken of Nett Salvador Iriarte. There are additionally four Co-Chairs of the Task Force. Andrew Yatilman is the Co-Chair for the State of Yap; Marcus Samo is the Co-Chair for the State of Chuuk; Mason

Albert is the Co-Chair for the State of Pohnpei; and Canney Palsis is the Co-Chair for the State of Kosrae.

Assistant Attorney General Robert Nakasone, Jr., will represent the Department of Justice. Assistant Secretary Erick Paul will represent the Department of Finance & Administration.

In addition to filling leadership positions, the Executive Order instructs that the conduct of public education activities shall include the proposed amendment through Public Law 22-172. There will be a total of nine (9) proposed constitutional amendments on the ballot this July, 2023, of which eight (8) are a result of the work of the 4th FSM Constitutional Convention directly and one is a result of the aforementioned public law.

The President has instructed the Division of Public Information

4th Constitutional Convention Public Education Awareness

Own Your Constitution & Vote!

to prepare nine (9) public service announcements, each targeting a different proposed constitutional amendment, to complement and amplify the in-person public education outreach activities being conducted by the Task Force. At the time of this release, all nine are presently with the Department of Justice for their clearance prior to dissemination.

The original Executive Order dated

September 6th, 2022, may be found here: https://gov.fm/files/EXECUTIVE_ORDER_ConCon_Public_Education_Task_Force.pdf

The amended Executive Order may be found here: https://gov.fm/files/Presidential%20Orders/EXECUTIVE_ORDER_Amendment_ConCon_Public_Education_Task_Force_March_17_2023.pdf



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Pohnpei Auditor encouraged by recent surprise cash counts of 20 Pohnpei offices and governments

By **Bill Jaynes**
The Kaselehlie Press

March 15, 2023

Pohnpei—Pohnpei State Auditor Ihlen K. Joseph has published the surprising results of a surprise simultaneous cash count of 20 state and municipal offices. This is not the first simultaneous surprise cash count that the Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) has conducted but it has been a while. Mr. Joseph said that several years ago his office conducted another surprise count and founds thousands of dollars of collected cash missing. “When this cash count report comes out, I want to be sure you cover it,” he said. “It was very encouraging and I want to be sure that they keep working on it.”

He said that the audit wasn’t perfect but that it was definitely a giant step in the right direction. “Based on the results of our surprise cash count inspection, we found great comfort in finding and knowing that public monies receipted or collected by entities listed below

were accounted for,” his cover letter to Governor Reed Oliver said, and then listed those offices:

Madolenihmw Government, Kitti Government, Sokehs Government, Kolonia Town Government, Dental Divisional of the Department of Health and Social Services (DH&SS), Kolonia and Madolenihmw Ice Plants, Outpatient of DH&SS, Pohnlangas Dispensary, Sokehs Dispensary, Kolonia Community Health Center, Division of Agriculture, and Pohnpei Public Broadcasting Corporation.

As auditors are prone to do, they had suggestions for improvement in record keeping, separation of duties, recording, and timely deposits to make, but they found no money to be missing.

Though it did find that money was missing from six of the governments, the amounts were nowhere near the alarming amount as in the previous cash count. There was a total discrepancy of \$1,872.71 in shortages in six offices.

The largest amount was at the U Municipal Government (UMG) where cash on hand was \$1,173.87 short of cash receipted. Auditors learned that one or more employees had “borrowed” the money for private or personal use. During a follow-up visit, auditors discovered that all of the missing money had been reimbursed and deposited into the UMG bank account. The same was found to be true of some DH&SS offices; however as of the date of the report none of that money had been reimbursed. At DH&SS Public Health, \$462.80 was missing. \$110.80 was missing at the Lukop Dispensary. \$100.80 was missing from the Wone Dispensary and \$16.40 from the Saladak Dispensary.

There was an unexplained \$8.34 discrepancy in the petty cash fund at Pohnpei’s Department of Treasury and Administration.

The Nett District Government’s

cash situation was the reverse of a shortage with an unexplained overage of \$876.36. The report said that weaknesses and deficiencies of internal controls over cash collection were cited as a finding in the most recent audit report of Nett District Government issued in February of 2022, and it appears that a large number of those weaknesses still exist.



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on March 1,2023 and for the many years
of serving your family and island
community, AYUW would like to take this
opportunity to say,

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**DIGITAL
FSM OFFICE**

THE DIGITAL FSM PROJECT

The Digital FSM Project began with the World Bank-funded installation of undersea fiber optic cable to provide reliable high speed connection between FSM and the rest of the world.



Under the **Digital FSM Office**, the current phase of the Project is the digital transformation of FSM's government services to better provide for the needs of the people of FSM and offer them the most modern, most advanced digital systems possible.

One of the major activities that the DFO will be coordinating is the existing Digital FSM Project that will in turn roll out e-government initiatives through a comprehensive digital framework. By leveraging cutting-edge digital technologies, the national and state governments will be able to streamline and enhance their operations, ultimately providing better services to the citizens of the FSM.

World Bank-funded FSM Sustainable Energy Development & Access Project breaks ground in Nahnbohnmal

Pohnpei State receiving three new generators to strengthen electrical grid

FSM Information Services

March 20, 2023

PALIKIR, Pohnpei—On March 20th, 2023, His Excellency David W. Panuelo—President of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)—attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the FSM Sustainable Energy Development & Access Project's (SEDAP's) three new generators at the Nahnbohnmal Power Plant in Pohnpei State. Funded by the World Bank, SEDAP is one of the central components of the first phase of the FSM's Energy Master Plan.



Pictured Above: President Panuelo, Governor Oliver, & Speaker Yamaguchi et al. at the groundbreaking ceremony in Nahnbohnmal

Pohnpei State's share of SEDAP is \$11.4 million (\$11,400,000) and tackles the upgrade of the Nahnbohnmal Power Plant, including the installation of three new medium-speed diesel generators, which intend to improve the reliability of electricity supply in Pohnpei State by providing about 7.5 MegaWatts of power (2.5 MegaWatts each) to serve base load and provide appropriate grid redundancy. Additionally, the project will assist Pohnpei Utilities Corporation with consultancy for technical specifications and analytical work; associated grid facilities to improve the operational performance and generation capacity of the corporation; waste oil storage tank and spill containment; removal of obsolete generation equipment; and electrotechnical and electronic equipment, such as a Supervisory Control & Data Acquisition (SCADA) power system, measuring, monitoring, and protection devices, and converters to help the utility improve its operational performance.

In other words, the program seeks to ensure that the State has reliable and efficient diesel generators that will be able to back up and work in sync with current efforts by Pohnpei Utilities Corporation to bolster and expand renewable energy inputs to the grid, including both solar-power and hydro-power, along with increased battery energy storage systems in the coming months and years.

SEDAP itself is a \$30 million (\$30,000,000) program of work that also

includes a new generator for Yap State Public Service Corporation; an additional one (1) MegaWatt of battery energy storage systems for Kosrae Utilities Authority; and renewable energy minigrids for the State of Chuuk and Chuuk Public Utilities Corporation.

“The issue of grid stability and power reliability was one of the key points raised at the recent Micronesian Islands Forum,” President Panuelo said during his remarks which, for history's sake, the Division of Public Information notes was during a power outage in Palikir as if to emphasize the need for such improvements in real-time. “I am pleased to see that the topic is now addressed in this project as Pohnpei Utilities Corporation is receiving new gensets that will allow easier integration of the various renewable energy systems into the state power grid. Equally important to highlight is the fact that our waste oil will be properly stored, and the old generation equipment will be removed and disposed of properly.”

Citizens may recall that President Panuelo discussed SEDAP's implementation during his State of the Nation address in January 2023.

During his remarks, President Panuelo gave appreciation and congratulations to His Majesty Nahnpwutak Pikeniap, Nahnmwarki of Sokehs; Degi Young, the Resident Representative of the World Bank for the North Pacific; the Honorable Reed B. Oliver, Governor of Pohnpei State; the Honorable Marvin T. Yamaguchi, Speaker of Pohnpei Legislature; Mr. Nixon Anson, CEO of Pohnpei Utilities Corporation; and Mr. Erick Paul, Chair of the Board of Pohnpei Utilities Corporation.

President Panuelo & Vice President Palik receive U.S. Peace Corps Exploratory Team

FSM Information Services

March 23, 2023

PALIKIR, Pohnpei—On March 23rd, 2023, His Excellency David W. Panuelo—President of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)—and the Honorable Aren B. Palik, Vice President of the FSM, received a high-level delegation from the U.S. Peace Corps who are in the country on an exploratory mission to assess a possible return of Peace Corps Volunteers. The President had previously written to the Peace Corps, and met with their Chief Executive Officer, on the margins of the U.S.-Pacific Islands Summit so as to request their reinstatement to the FSM.

In the FSM’s context, Peace Corps Volunteers began arriving in 1966, serving exclusively in the Education Sector until 1970 when Volunteers were asked to serve in the Agriculture, Community Economic Development, and Youth in Development Sectors. When the FSM became a Constitutional Government in 1979, Peace Corps Volunteers worked in sanitation, forestry, and fisheries. From 2000 to 2005 Peace Corps Volunteers worked on natural resource conservation, community building, and youth development; and from 2006 to 2018 at the time of closure, Peace Corps Volunteers worked exclusively in the Education Sector.

Peace Corps assists by providing volunteers who build capacity and help interested countries in meeting their

need for trained men and women in six sectors: Agriculture, Community Economic Development, Education, Environment, Health, and Youth in Development. Volunteers serve a minimum of 27 months with possible extensions for up to five years. Crucially, Peace Corps only operates where explicitly invited and requested by relevant national, state, and community representatives, and with an aim to enhance capacity and resilience. In this respect, the U.S. Peace Corps is analogous to the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

In the meeting with U.S. Peace Corps representatives, President Panuelo described that some of the cited reasons (either formally and publicly or informally) for Peace Corps’ pullout of the FSM were no longer applicable. For example, in 2018 at the time of closure, Caroline Islands Air (an FSM State-Owned Enterprise) was unable to provide guaranteed medical evacuation to Volunteers; on March 24th, 2023, Caroline Islands Air received an additional air asset, and has the appropriate technical and managerial staff to accommodate urgent travel needs. Additionally, the Nation’s communications capacity is greatly strengthened, with persons able to access 3G and 4G networks via their telephone on many islands.

As for where Peace Corps might be able to offer assistance to the FSM, while President Panuelo and Vice President

Palik reiterated their appreciation that the Peace Corps will meet with the State Governments’ respective Executive and Legislative Branches, and that the States’ should ultimately be able to determine where and how the Peace Corps cooperates with the FSM, it was suggested that the Agriculture Sector might result in the greatest assistance. “We do express the importance of food security to our country,” the President said. “Counterparts for the Volunteers could include, for example, the Agricultural Divisions of the State Governments, and the non-government organizations in the FSM.”

“That’s just an idea though,” the President continued. “It’s our hope that

the FSM’s States will be the ones to ultimately choose the direction of how Peace Corps will cooperate with the FSM.”

The Peace Corps assessment team is visiting all four of the FSM’s States after having completed a recent visit to the Republic of Palau. To the knowledge of the FSM Government, the Republic of the Marshall Islands has also asked for the Peace Corps to send them an assessment team. It is the opinion of the FSM National Government that the U.S. Peace Corps ought to return to every Pacific Island Country, including all three possessing a Compact of Free Association with the United States.



Pictured Above: President Panuelo & Vice President Palik pose with U.S. Peace Corps & U.S. Embassy staff

U.S. Embassy Kolonia hosts SUNY Stony Brook Associate Dean for Educational Advisor Training and High School Visits

U.S. Embassy, Kolonia

March 28, 2023

The Public Affairs Section of U.S. Embassy Kolonia warmly welcomed State University of New York (SUNY) Stony Brook’s Dr. Yu-wan Wang to Kolonia on Monday. Dr. Wang provided a full day of instruction to student advisors from Pohnpei high schools and College of Micronesia-FSM. She shared information on key topics such as the college application process, how students can write their personal essays, and the importance of student career services. She ended the program with a mock “student college fair” to facilitate learning.

Charge d’affaires Alissa Bibb, who joined the advisors for lunch, learned from the advisors about student interests and the challenges they face in attending school in the United States. She said: “Education Advisors can play a key role in students’ lives and make a difference for their future paths. We’re pleased to host this training, as well as provide a new full-time State Department funded EducationUSA advisor based at COM, who once hired will provide support and training for all students from the FSM who want to explore higher education in the United States.”

EducationUSA is a U.S. Department of State network of over 430 international

student advising centers in more than 175 countries and territories and can be found at <https://educationusa.state.gov>

Dr. Wang will continue her trip by visiting

with high school students tomorrow to provide guidance for students interested in studying in the United States and will finish her visit with a meeting with COM-FSM’s President.



President Panuelo & Vice President Palik meet Admiral John C. Aquilino, Commander of U.S. INDO-PACIFIC Command, discuss regional security & Yap State infrastructure upgrades

FSM Information Services

March 20, 2023

PALIKIR, Pohnpei—On March 18th, 2023, His Excellency David W. Panuelo, President of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the

Honorable Aren B. Palik, Vice President of the FSM, and the Honorable Kandhi A. Elieisar, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, joined Admiral John C. Aquilino, Commander of the U.S. INDO-PACIFIC Command, and Charge'd'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in the FSM, Alissa Bibb, to discuss items of mutual interest and importance to the

FSM-U.S. Enduring Partnership. President Panuelo first met Admiral Aquilino in Honolulu, Hawaii, for high-level defense talks in July, 2021, with one of the outcomes of those discussions including the Admiral's commitment to visit the FSM.

Prior to meeting the President and Vice President, Admiral Aquilino visited the State of Yap to provide briefings to the Honorable Charles Chieng, Governor of Yap, as well as the Yap State Legislature and the traditional leaders of the Council of Pilung and the Council of Tamol. The Admiral discussed topics such as the U.S. funding for improving the runway in Yap State, which will enable better disaster response and decrease fuel consumption for aircraft, benefitting the FSM socially, economically, and ecologically. In addition, the Admiral described the continued U.S. commitment to enhancing stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

The meeting between President Panuelo, Vice President Palik, and Admiral Aquilino covered similar territory as the meeting between the Admiral and the leadership of Yap State. The Admiral described to the President and Vice President what the upgraded airport and seaport will look like, with the airport to include an expanded runway and the seaport to include dredging and forming-up piers and warehouses, among other infrastructure. Additionally, the President, Vice President, and Admiral discussed regional security issues and concerns.

Regarding the latter, the Admiral offered, and the President and Vice President enthusiastically accepted, to provide forthcoming briefings on Climate Change projections in the FSM, with the aim of providing leadership renewed capacity in identifying, mitigating, and adapting to Climate Change-related threats and natural disasters of any type.

Both President Panuelo and Vice President Palik thanked Admiral Aquilino for his advocacy with regards to strengthening the Compact of Free Association between the FSM and the U.S., and solicited the Admiral's advocacy, where appropriate, with relevant U.S. officials with regards to infrastructure support, and economic development. President Panuelo described the importance of more dedicated support to road infrastructure and human development capacity, and Vice President Palik described the importance of new programs and facilities, such as the expansions to the Yap State Airport and Seaport, translating into direct economic benefit to the Nation.

"It was a pleasure to see my good friend, Admiral Aquilino," President Panuelo said in a statement following the meeting. "The Admiral kept his promise to visit the FSM and provided extensive opportunities for 'Questions & Answers' with all of Yap State's leadership as well as the FSM National Government."

"I think a sense of patriotism for our relationship is important," the President continued, "Because there is no closer ally to the FSM than the United States. Our Enduring Partnership, as codified by the Compact, means, among so many other things, that our country is genuinely independent and genuinely sovereign—but also protected by the United States as part of the homeland. The U.S. Armed Forces are also the FSM's Armed Forces, and our own FSM citizens enlist at a higher rate per capita than any U.S. State. The delegation of our defense authorities is under our own FSM Constitution and we choose to do so freely, and we fight for the same freedoms, like peace, unity, and liberty, and protecting the rules-based international order."



Pictured Above: Yap State Leadership meet with Admiral Aquilino et al. (This photo was taken by U.S. Navy Chief Mass Communication Specialist Shannon M. Smith)



Pictured Above (L→R): T.H. Kandhi A. Elieisar, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs; Admiral John C. Aquilino, Commander of USINDOPACOM; H.E. David W. Panuelo, President of the FSM; CDA Alissa Bibb; T.H. Aren B. Palik, Vice President of the FSM; Major Jonathan James, USINDOPACOM Desk Officer for the FSM



UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME - JOB DESCRIPTION

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the knowledge frontier organization for sustainable development in the UN Development System and serves as the integrator for collective action to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet. This position is located at the UNDP Pacific sub-office in Pohnpei State in the Federated States of Micronesia which was established in October 2021. This office is set up to serve the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The office will work to deliver the UNDP multi-country programme document (MCPD, 2023-2027) in these five countries.

UNDP in the Pacific has developed its MCPD, 2023-2027 to guide its interventions in the next five years in full alignment and directly to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF, 2023–27). The UNSDCF and UNDP MCPD are designed in full alignment with the 2030 agenda, Samoa Pathway, and 2050 Blue Content Strategy, which is endorsed by the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) among others.

The UNDP Pacific Office next five-year plan strategic priorities are encapsulated under three outcome areas: (i) Planet, (ii) Prosperity, and (iii) Peace. The programme portfolio will include mutually reinforcing work streams crafted around two clusters (i) Resilience and Climate Change; and (ii) Inclusive growth and Effective governance, supported by a policy and innovation team, Operations team, Management and Oversight team that provides strategic guidance on results Management and compliance entrusted with the corporate alignment, programme finance management and quality assurance, and strategic communications team that provides knowledge management and communication support to all programme interventions.

<p>1. Job Title: Driver Department: Operations Reports to: Operations and Travel Associate, G6 Grade Level: G2 Salary range: \$10,270 to \$14,060 Annually Direct Reports: none Position Number: 00166053 Duty Station: Pohnpei, FSM Career Track: General Service Contract Modality: Fixed Term Appointment Link to advertisement: www.undp.org/pacific/jobs</p>	<p>2. Job Title: Human Resources Associate Department: Operations Reports to: Operations Manager, P3 Grade Level: G6 Salary range: \$22,331 to \$30,955 Annually Direct Reports: none Position Number: 00196884 Duty Station: Pohnpei, FSM Career Track: General Service Contract Modality: Fixed Term Appointment Local Link to advertisement: www.undp.org/pacific/jobs</p>
<p>3. Job Title: ICT and Asset Management Associate Department: Operations Reports to: Administrative Analyst Grade Level: G6 Salary range: \$22,331 to \$30,955 Annually Direct Reports: none Position Number: 00196885 Duty Station: Pohnpei, FSM Career Track: General Service Contract Modality: Fixed Term Appointment Link to advertisement: www.undp.org/pacific/jobs</p>	<p>4. Job Title: Operations and Travel Associate Department: Operations Reports to: Administrative Analyst Grade Level: G6 Salary Range: \$22,331 to \$30,955 Annually Direct Reports: Driver, G2 Position Number: 00196886 Duty Station: Pohnpei, FSM Career Track: General Service Contract Modality: Fixed Term Appointment Link to advertisement: www.undp.org/pacific/jobs</p>
<p>5. Job Title: Programme Associate, Resilience and Climate Change Department: Programme Reports to: Programme Analyst, P2 Grade Level: G6 Salary Range: \$22,331 to \$30,955 Annually Direct Reports: none Position Number: 00196888 Duty Station: Pohnpei, FSM Career Stream: Programme Contract Modality: Fixed Term Appointment Link to advertisement: www.undp.org/pacific/jobs</p>	<p>6. Job Title: Programme Associate, Inclusive Governance and Economic Growth Department: Programme Reports to: Programme Analyst, P2 Grade Level: G6 Salary Range: \$22,331 to \$30,955 Annually Direct Reports: none Position Number: 00196889 Duty Station: Pohnpei, FSM Career Stream: Programme Contract Modality: Fixed Term Appointment Link to Advertisement: www.undp.org/pacific/jobs</p>
<p>7. Job Title: Administrative Analyst Department: Operations Reports to: Operations Manager, P3 Grade Level: NOA Salary Range: \$30,524 to \$37,555 Annually Position Number: 9203 Duty Station: Pohnpei, FSM Career Track: General Service Contract Modality: Fixed Term Appointment Link to advertisement: www.undp.org/pacific/jobs</p>	<p>To apply please visit our website at www.undp.org/pacific/jobs Please note that all applications are to be done online.</p> <p>If you need more information about these job vacancies, please visit our office at Pohnnumwpwompw, Nett or call at 320-4456.</p> <p><u>CLOSING DATE for all applications is Friday, 7 April, 2023</u></p>

Australian student Sophie is living and learning in Micronesia

Australian university student Sophie Rowan says she is having the experience and adventure of a lifetime here in the FSM.

Embassy of Australia to the FSM

March 24, 2023

Pohnpei—Sophie won an Australian scholarship to study and do work experience in the FSM under an Australian program called the New Colombo Plan.

The New Colombo Plan aims to lift the knowledge of Australian students about the Indo-Pacific region, by supporting them to study and live one or more countries.

The program helps young Australians to know more about and learn from their Pacific neighbours, and hopefully make lifelong friendships.

Sophie is spending a semester in Pohnpei, studying public health and Micronesian studies at the College of Micronesia in Pohnpei. This is complementing her Australian degree in Public Health and Global Studies at the Australian Catholic University in Australia.

Sophie is also doing a placement at the Pohnpei Department of Health Services, working with Dr Eliaser Johnson to collect key health data and conduct

policy research for the Pohnpei State Health Review. Sophie says this has been an incredible opportunity to apply and develop the knowledge and skills she has learnt throughout her four years of study.

Sophie says living in the dorms on the COM campus has allowed her to make friends with people from all over FSM and learn about their diverse and unique cultures - including learning some fun Micronesian phrases!

Over the last two months, Sophie has also had many exciting adventures in Pohnpei, including climbing Pwisehn Malek, snorkelling Manta Road, and attending the Rotary Club Trivia Night and the International Women's Day celebrations. She says these experiences have helped her make meaningful connections and friendships and filled her with a new-found passion for Pacific health and development.

"I'm so grateful for all of the wonderful people who have welcomed me into the community. I'm so happy to be in Pohnpei and couldn't have chosen a better place to call my home away from home. Kalanghan Pohnpei!"



Early Action Rainfall Watch could reduce impacts of rainfall extremes in Pohnpei



Last week (March 23 – 24, 2023), the Weather Service Office Pohnpei underwent training on development of an Early Action Rainfall Watch (EAR Watch), a bulletin providing early warning of rainfall extremes for the disaster management sector. Training was provided with assistance from the Australian and New Zealand aid funded Climate and Oceans Support Program in the Pacific (COSPPac). Stakeholders representing disaster management agencies and outer island authorities joined the workshop to discuss ways to channel predictions of extreme rainfall to the community level.

Rainfall extremes are problematic for communities in the Federated States of Micronesia. Prolonged drought associated with the 2015/16 El Niño event led to severe water shortages across most islands. Current dry conditions on the islands of Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi have led to widespread crop damage. "On Kapingamarangi It has been very dry. When you shake the coconuts, there's very little water inside", noted Juity Hainrich, Mayor Representative, Nukuoro Community. Advanced warning is crucial for communities on outer islands, who are far away from National and State Government services. "We need drought early warning so we can clean our tanks in advance rather than waiting for the drought to begin. The COSPPac programme is a critical need for our communities".

The EAR Watch could cover all islands in FSM, providing information on current drought status and rainfall

predictions for future months. Wendolin Lainos, Captain of the Fire and Emergency Services believed the EAR Watch could help the Disaster Coordinating Office to pass drought information more effectively to the heads of agencies. "The EAR Watch template includes detail on impacts. This would make it easier for the DCO to present drought early warning information to the Governor when needed".

Simplified infographics, social media posts and radio broadcasts are important for channelling key messages to communities and households. "I hope WSO Pohnpei will adopt the EAR Watch" said Rickson Higgins, Disaster Focal Point and Community Liaison with the Department of Education. "The infographics will really help schools in the outer islands. They will be able to request assistance with maintaining water tanks in advance of a drought, so that they can capture any rainfall that comes leading up to a drought".

The EAR Watch also provides an early 'heads up' about upcoming prolonged wet periods. "if we know that the coming months are likely to be very wet, we can train our volunteer network in advance to roll out hygiene campaigns. If they are able to do this before water borne disease outbreaks start, we can avoid a lot of suffering" said Morgan David, Disaster Management Officer with the Micronesia Red Cross Society.

For more information about rainfall predictions and the EAR Watch, contact the WSO Pohnpei, at wallace.jacob@noaa.gov or call (691) 320 – 2248.

U.S. Coast Guard, Federated States of Micronesia National Police conduct at-sea engagements to combat illegal fishing, strengthen skills

By Chief Warrant Officer Sara Muir
U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia / Sector Guam

March 21, 2023

SANTA RITA, Guam — The U.S. Coast Guard and Federated States of Micronesia National Police conducted a successful at-sea engagement to combat illegal fishing in Yap State on March 16, 2023.

The crews of USCGC Oliver Henry (WPC 1140) and the FSS Tosiwo Nakayama (P901) conducted a joint patrol near Yap State in support of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency's Operation 365, part of the FFA's regional monitoring control and surveillance operations to stop illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in the Pacific.

"The crew enjoyed conducting a professional exchange including navigation and seamanship training during a close-quarters formation steaming with our colleagues aboard the FSS Tosiwo Nakayama before they pulled into Yap," said Lt. Freddy Hofschneider, commanding officer of the Oliver Henry.

The Tosiwo Nakayama is currently FSM's only active Guardian-class patrol boat. Under the Australian Pacific Maritime Security Program, Australia is delivering 22 Guardian-class Patrol Boats to 12 Pacific Island nations and Timor-Lesté. They also provide additional training to enable nations to make the most out of this capability.

The FSM is a sovereign nation with full diplomatic relations, deep ties, and a cooperative relationship with the United States. They participate in an amended Compact of Free Association with the U.S., under which the FSM and the United States agreed that the U.S. has full authority and responsibility for defense and security matters relating to the FSM. Many FSM citizens also live, work, and study in the U.S. and voluntarily serve in the U.S. Armed Forces at per capita rates higher than many U.S. states.

"The ongoing partnership between the FSM and the U.S. Coast Guard seeks to enhance FSM's sovereignty and capability to combat illicit maritime activity, particularly illegal fishing, to the benefit of all Pacific partners but with a focus on the people of the FSM and their economic and food security needs," said Capt. Nick Simmons, commander of U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam. "We appreciate the efforts of the National Police, the U.S. Embassy, and our Australian Pacific Maritime Security Program partners to make these shared multilateral operations possible to increase regional security and prosperity."

The crew also leveraged time underway while on patrol in the FSM Exclusive Economic Zone for maintenance, Basic Engineering Casualty Control Exercises or BECCEs, and cutter boat training. The crew is on a four-week expeditionary patrol throughout Western Oceania.

The Oliver Henry is the 40th 154-foot



The crews of USCGC Oliver Henry (WPC 1140) and the FSS Tosiwo Nakayama (P901) conduct a joint patrol near Yap State in support of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency's Operation 365, part of the FFA's regional monitoring control and surveillance operations to stop illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in the Pacific, on March 16, 2023. The Tosiwo Nakayama is currently FSM's only active Guardian-class patrol boat. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Breandan Muldowney)

Sentinel-class fast response cutter named for Oliver T. Henry, Jr., an enlisted African American Coast Guard member first to break the color barrier of a then-segregated Service.

It homeports in Guam, working with U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam, which comprises nearly 300 personnel to provide a significant portion of the U.S. Coast Guard's enduring regional presence in Oceania.

Surveillance Centre's overarching plan for Regional Monitoring Control and Surveillance operations. OP365 provides comprehensive support to regional surveillance and enforcement efforts in Pacific Island Countries on an ongoing basis. OP365 requires the concerted and consistent effort of all 17 Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency member nations and the four members of the Pacific Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group countries, Australia, France, New Zealand, and the United States, to be successful.

Operation 365 is the Regional Fisheries

Caroline Islands Air welcomes its latest addition to fleet

Caroline Islands Air

March 27, 2023

On Friday, March 24 2023 Caroline Islands Air, Inc. welcomed a Britten Norman Islander to its fleet. This addition will reintroduce services to our remote island communities. Ensuring our remote communities have an efficient option for travel to our island centers.

On behalf of the entire Caroline Islands Team I would like to thank all those that helped with this effort. We would like to recognize and acknowledge the help of The FSM President His excellency David W. Panuelo, The Speaker of the FSM CONGRESS Honorable Wesley Simina and all members of congress, and The honorable secretary of the FSM Department of TC&I Carl Apis and the Aviation Division led by Assistant Secretary Harris. Thank You So Much!

After all safety checks are complete we will share our exciting new routes and schedules. We look forward to welcoming you onboard.



2023 FACSSO outcomes

FSM Department of Education

March 20, 2023

Pohnpei—On Wednesday, March 1st 2023, the FSM Association of Chief State School Officers (FACSSO) gathered in Pohnpei to discuss upcoming plans and policies for education nationwide.

The convening included representation by the Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap State Directors of Education, the National Secretary and Assistant Secretaries of Education, and the President of the College of Micronesia-FSM.

The three-day meeting resulted in a variety of outcomes, including the announcement of official dates for the next Micronesian Teacher Education Conference (MTEC). MTEC 2023 will be hosted from July 3-7 2023 in Kosrae by the Kosrae Department of Education. Other top takeaways from the FACSSO convening are summarized below:

Professional Development Framework for All Teachers Endorsed

A new national framework presenting standards and guidance for teacher professional development across the FSM has been endorsed by FACSSO. Known as the National Professional Learning and Development Framework (NPLDF), this policy will ensure that teachers receive a minimum standard of opportunities to learn and improve their practice each year. The new framework is the outcome of collaboration from the IQBE National Working Group for Teacher Development.

Salary Increase for FSM Teachers

In recognition of the need for improved pay, FACSSO introduced a resolution supporting a salary increase for FSM teachers nationwide. While the application of this will be tailored to each state's context, the soon-to-be endorsed resolution declares that National and State governments of the FSM are responsible for ensuring that teacher salaries are increased.

Teacher Certification Policy Changes

A FACSSO resolution was passed to amend the nation's Teachers Certification Policy. This amendment, presented by COM-FSM, will permit teachers to receive credit for national certification exams (NSTTs) by completing a series of courses at the College of Micronesia-FSM. This resolution represents an advancement in supports to teacher certification, and was inspired by discussions coming out of the IQBE National Working Group.

- A FACSSO motion was also made to launch a committee exploring the impacts of the current Teachers Certification Policy. A resolution was proposed to solidify the formation of this committee, which will identify potential needs for revisions or expansions to existing exam content to better reflect the skillsets of Early Childhood, Special Education and Career and Technical Education teachers.

Healthy Schools Resolution

Working together with the World Health Organization, FACSSO agreed to draft a resolution in support of the formation of a new group that will bring attention to the health of students in schools and explore updates to healthy school policies.



POPA's Senior Auditor achieved Certification as SAI-Financial Auditor

Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor

March 15, 2023

Pohnpei—Cherry Lyn Somcio, Senior Auditor Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) passed the Professional Education for Supreme Audit Institution-Pilot (PESA-P), a program launched by International Organization of Supreme Audit Institution (INTOSAI). PESA-P is a professional education initiative that aims to create a critical mass of

SAI audit professionals with competence to add value to the Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) professionalization journey. The PESA-P syllabus is based on INTOSAI Competency Framework. POPA's Public Auditor Mr. Ihlen K. Joseph nominated Ms. Somcio to Financial Audit stream. Her coach Ms. Alice Etse, Audit Manager helped her in applying PESA-P education to POPA's context, monitor her progress and helped her in the developing her Initial Professional Development Portfolio (IPDP). Ms. Somcio completed the mandatory 70 hours of digitized education and 30 hours education through social learning, accessing other resources



and completing the Initial IPDP. The IPDP will use as start for the Continuing

Professional Development (CPD) as IDI Certified Financial Auditor. After completing the mandatory digitized education, Ms. Somcio took and passed the two examinations assessment in September 2022 and received the certification on February 28, 2023. The assessment examinations were proctored by Pearson VUE. The PESA-P two assessment examination fee

was paid by the Pacific Association of Supreme Audit Institution (PASAI).

Ms. Somcio wants to encourage her fellow auditor in the FSM to participate in the next PESA-P program. She said "PESA-P is a very challenging program because it requires attention and time. But it is really rewarding not only for the certification that I received but also for the learning experience throughout the program. I appreciate the opportunity as learned a deeper understanding of the SAI value and benefits, techniques and steps of the audit process and my role as a government auditor in enhancing the accountability, transparency and governance for Pohnpei State."

Global Greengrants Fund (GGF) continues to support Micronesia Communities

Global Greengrants Fund

Micronesia—The GGF recently awarded four more grants to communities across Micronesia. The Koupweliki Organization of Kitti, which is comprised of numerous farmers/fishers from Section #3 of Kitti Municipality Pohnpei, has received a \$5,000 grant to work with its members and their families to carry out climate smart agriculture and other sustainable income generating activities to boost food security in their communities. The fund will also help them formally register so they can carry out more activities in the future.

Ngardok Nature Reserve in Palau, was awarded a water security project of \$5,000 to support activities to keep the Ngardok Lake, which provides water to numerous communities in Palau, fully serviceable. This will include removal of invasive species, prevention of fire and other hazards, and replanting of native plants around the reserve.

The Oneisonmw Environmental Conservation Management Association (OECMA) organization of Chuuk has received a \$14,456 for a watershed rehabilitation project. This will include replanting/revegetation of native species in certain areas that have been decimated with unsustainable agriculture activities.

The Parent Teacher Association of Wone in Pohnpei has also received a \$5,000 grant to help promote a clean community program. This will include awareness on climate change, solid waste and other related topics.

GGF continues to support community-led programs around Micronesia. All interested community organizations may contact William N. Kostka, who represents Micronesia on the GGF Pacific Advisory Board, at director@ourmicronesia.org. The next round of proposal deadlines is March 31, 2023.

World Water Day 2023 celebrated by COM, UNICEF and PDOE with support from the Australian Government DFAT

*Gina A. Segal and Mercedes Olter
College of Micronesia*

On March 22, 2023, the COMFSM Interns, in partnership with UNICEF and the Pohnpei Department of Education (PDOE), and with support from the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) hosted an event in celebration of World Water Day at the College of Micronesia's Practice Gym with the theme of "Accelerating Change to Solve the Water and Sanitation Crisis". There were approximately 300 guests in attendance of the event, 173 of them female and 127 of them male.

The event started off with a warm welcoming from the College's President, Dr. Theresa Koroivulaono who expressed her enthusiasm in the engagement among the students in advocating the importance of access to safe and clean drinking water. This allowed the program to segue to the next part of the agenda, an inspiring World Water Day video, courtesy of Micronesian Productions. The MP team interviewed a number of students from the 11 pilot schools WASH club members to gauge their views and hopes for the changes they would like to see in FSM's future water care.

At the event, students from Pohnpei's school WASH and Environmental clubs, teachers, principals, parents, and members of the Australian Embassy, Japan Embassy, US Embassy, PDOE, DECEM, UNICEF, IOM and UNRCO. The Australian Ambassador Her Excellency Jo Cowley captured the audience's attention with one of Australia's Indigenous Dreaming Stories, the tale of Tiddalik which describes the water-holding frog from Australia.

During the event, everyone was able to witness and engage in relevant negotiations and presentations based on the importance of appropriate water care and distribution. Students from the schools presented the results of their school and community water testing and called the government and relevant authorities to take action to keep their drinking water safe from contamination.

Additionally, the guests were able to play different games and join the students in creating artful presentations such as drawings and Commitment Origami based around the event's theme. The purpose of the Commitment Origami Activity was to spark up the interest and encourage the children to brainstorm ways they can bring about change to their water dilemma either within their communities or for the whole of the country. Esmirelda Aldis, one of the interns, shares "The focus is not on the size of the fire, but the intention of your efforts to put the fire out that brings about the necessary changes in your surroundings."

With so much positive feedback, the interns hope to see more of these meaningful events from the groups involved in the organization of this World Water Day event.



Obsidian point discovered on Kapingamarangi Atoll, Micronesia and Prehistoric Regional Interactions

Takuya Nagaoka (Pasifika Renaissance)

Peter J. Sheppard (University of Auckland)

Callan Ross-Sheppard (McGill University)

Nina Kononenko (Australian Museum)

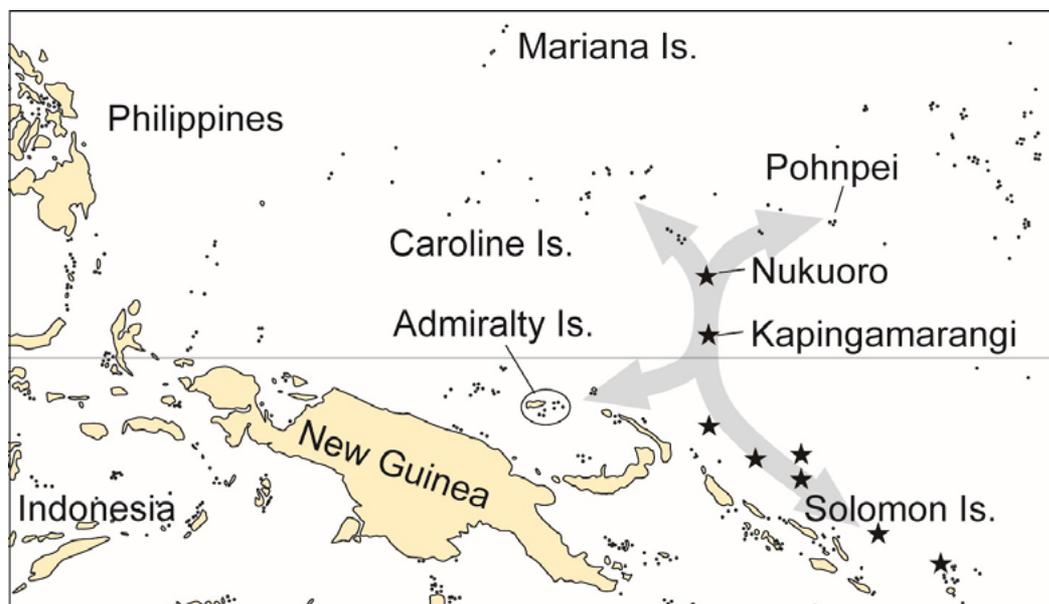
Recently, our archaeological ability to source artifacts has significantly improved through the adoption of new scientific analytical methods. This progress enabled us to identify prehistoric long-distance interactions in the Pacific, by demonstrating movement of artifacts and materials. In spite of the extensive exchange networks historically documented in Micronesia, archaeological studies of prehistoric interactions in the region are less developed compared with relatively well-studied Melanesia and Polynesia due to the absence or limited number of portable artifacts that can be traced to source (e.g., stone adzes, pottery, volcanic glass), especially in eastern Micronesia.

We have recently published a paper “Obsidian Point Discovered on Kapingamarangi Atoll, Micronesia: Implications for Post-settlement Regional Interactions” in “Waka Kuaka: The Journal of the Polynesian Society”, focusing on prehistoric island interaction between Micronesia and Melanesia (<https://thepolynesiansociety.org/jps/index.php/JPS/article/view/606>). This paper is based on our analysis of an obsidian point, which was discovered by chance by local people during the expansion of a taro patch on Kapingamarangi Atoll, an island inhabited by Polynesian people, in Micronesia. As it was found with human bones and other ornaments, there was an ancient burial site there. Obsidian is a volcanic glass, which doesn't occur naturally in Micronesia but at some volcanoes in Melanesia. Since obsidian pieces from different volcanoes have

different geochemical characteristics, we can identify obsidian artifacts' sources.

With the assistance of the FSM Office of National Archives, Culture and Historic Preservation and Mr. Edger Lickaneth (then Legislator representing Kapingamarangi), we conducted a geochemical analysis of the obsidian point in New Zealand in 2012. The result shows that it was brought from the Admiralty Islands in Papua New Guinea over about 900 km. A similar obsidian artifact, which is said to have been brought by foreigners from “Fiji,” was kept by the chief Lekka on a neighboring Polynesian island, Nukuoro in 1910. In addition, two obsidian points were found at the (probably single) stone tomb on the most sacred and architecturally elaborated islet, Nandouwas in Nan Madol during the early colonial period, while two pieces were also more recently found by American archaeologists during excavations. These findings suggest that those obsidian artifacts were brought from the Admiralties to Micronesia via Polynesian islands (Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi) during the first half of the second millennium AD (AD 1000-1500) and they had significant social value as prestige goods, probably serving as chiefly heirlooms in Nukuoro and grave goods in Kapingamarangi and Pohnpei.

Other archaeological, ethnological, linguistic, and DNA data also support that there was communication network between Melanesia and Micronesia via a chain of Polynesian Outliers (culturally Polynesian islands located outside the main Polynesian region) in Micronesia (Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi), PNG (Nukuria, Takuu, and Nukuanu), and the Solomon Islands (Ontong Java, Sikaiana, Taumako and Tokopia), which transmitted many cultural traits between the two regions. In addition to skillful Caroline Islands seafarers, Polynesian Outlier populations had an important role in the prehistoric interactions between Micronesia and Melanesia during this dynamic period in the western Pacific, which was possibly activated by Polynesian intrusion into the region related to a larger Polynesian expansion into eastern Polynesia around AD 1000. A typical example of this communication network is the distribution of loom leaving, spreading from Micronesia to Vanuatu through the Polynesian Outliers.



Prehistoric interactions between Micronesia and Melanesia



Further, we argue that the Saudeleur dynasty of Pohnpei, which achieved the development of a famous megalithic politico-religious center, Nan Madol, was influential in the interaction sphere during its height in AD 1000–1500 and functioned as a focal point for island interactions in the wider region, expanding both into northern Melanesia and western Polynesia. This is shown by the presence of obsidian artifacts from the Admiralties found at Nan Madol and the possible transfer of kava plants from Pohnpei to the Admiralties.

Thus, by using archaeological, linguistic, historical, ethnological, oral traditional and DNA data, the analysis of this rare obsidian artifact has deepened our understanding of prehistoric interaction in the western Pacific during the first half of the second millennium AD.

Pacific Island nations meet on Pathways for the Global Just transition away from fossil fuels

Pacific Islands Climate Action Network

March 15, 2023

Days after two cyclones made landfall on Vanuatu within the span of 48 hours, ministers from Pacific Island nations are gathering in the nation's capital from today to deliberate on building towards regional solidarity around a managed phaseout of fossil fuels.

This Ministerial Dialogue, hosted by the Governments of Vanuatu and Tuvalu in Port Vila, follows on from COP27 in Egypt, where the Governments of Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Fiji hosted a Ministerial Dialogue aimed at navigating a rapid, global phaseout of fossil fuels while continuing to sustainably develop. At the close of COP27, more than 80 countries were in support of a phaseout of all fossil fuels.

Vanuatu, home to 300,000 people, has the highest disaster risk on the planet - and the recent back-to-back cyclones only highlight the Pacific's vulnerability to escalating climate risks. Like all Pacific Island nations, the country is disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis but continues to show great climate leadership. Just days before the cyclones hit, Vanuatu secured a historic motion supported by 105 countries to ask the International Court of Justice to define what legal responsibility countries have for not acting on the climate crisis.

Scientific evidence shows that committed emissions from existing fossil fuel energy infrastructure jeopardizes the 1.5°C goal, and nearly half of existing fossil fuel production sites need to be shut down early if global heating is to be limited to 1.5°C. This means that there is no room for any new expansion of coal, oil, and gas production. To date, current international climate change frameworks have not constrained fossil fuel extraction at a rate consistent with the global temperature goal, and a liveable future hangs in the balance.

Joseph Sikulu, 350.org Pacific Managing Director says: "To have a fighting chance of keeping global heating below 1.5 degrees, the world needs to rapidly phase out coal, oil and gas. The question now is, what comes next for Pacific countries, with almost negligible emissions, that currently rely on fossil fuels for

transport and energy access?

At the heart of a Just Transition is that no one is left behind, especially those who have contributed the least to the climate crisis. That means ensuring our communities have access to alternative energy in the wake of a climate disaster and Pacific governments have the resources to implement national-level transition plans. A transition without these is neither just nor equitable, and to make the energy transition without giving space for the Pacific to lead and thrive would be replacing one bad system with another. The global shift away from fossil fuels must not replicate the extraction, exclusion and inequality of the fossil fuel industry."

Lavetanalagi Seru, Regional Policy Coordinator, Pacific Islands Climate Action Network(PICAN) says:

"Every natural disaster is now a fossil-fuelled disaster, exacerbated further by the world's unwillingness to break its addiction to fossil fuels. Pacific people and our economies are in a constant state of recovery stemming from a crisis that we have contributed to the least. Once again, Pacific leaders are exemplifying the leadership that is required, by coming together to discuss a just transition that supports Pacific Islanders and ensures that no one is left behind.

We need world leaders to join hands with us in the Pacific and tackle the climate crisis at its source: by stopping coal, oil and gas expansion, planning a scale-down in production, and supporting a just transition to a low-carbon system that provides energy access and sustainable development for all."

Tanya Afu from the Solomon Islands



Co-Chairs Minister Ralph Regenvanu and Minister Seve Paeniu

Climate Action Network (SICAN) says that:

"The Pacific region contributes negligibly to the carbon emissions, yet are greatly impacted by the impacts of the climate crisis. Our communities have been hammered and displaced by tropical cyclones, heavy rainfall and flooding, and sea level rise. To address this, it is very important to phase out coal, oil and fossil fuel. Our Pacific government and leaders at the Ministerial Dialogue in Vanuatu must work together to come up with solutions and a way forward that will ensure a transition that is just and equitable for all our communities."

Richard Gokrun, Node Coordinator, Tuvalu Climate Action Network (TuCAN) says that:

"The intensity and frequency of natural disasters in our Pacific region is triggered by the excessive emissions by wealthiest countries prioritizing economic gains instead of focusing on human rights. These emissions accelerate rising global temperatures, exposing the most vulnerable countries to very real climate threats. We bear the cost of these climate crises and endure the adverse impacts of cyclones, droughts, sea level rise, displacement, loss and damage, etc.

We salute our Pacific Leaders at the Ministerial Dialogue in Vanuatu to call for the managed phase out of fossil fuel. We urge world leaders to join in solidarity with the Pacific to prioritize emissions reduction and meet Paris Agreement targets. In addition to this, our commitment to the environment needs to extend beyond mitigation measures, to ensure the safety and future of our communities."

The Peer Review Team reviewed the works of the OCPA

The Office of Chuuk State Public Auditor

The Peer Review Team consisting of auditors Mr. Satrunino Tewid, Acting Public Auditor from the Office of the Public Auditor, Republic of Palau; Ms. Elizabeth M. Jonah, Staff Auditor II, Office of the Public Auditor, Kosrae State; and Ms. Dilrae U. Mechol, Junior Auditor II, Office of the Public Auditor, Republic of Palau; completed a peer review of the Office of Chuuk State Public Auditor (OCPA). The peer review team reviewed the procedures comprising the internal quality control system of OCPA if adequate and operating effectively to provide reasonable assurance of compliance with Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States and applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

According to the opinion of the peer review team, the internal quality control system was adequately designed and operating effectively. The office received a rating of "pass" in the review. A sample of audit engagements that were reviewed was the completed engagements during the period October 1, 2017 to September 30, 2020.

Copies of the peer review reports were also directly issued to Honorable Alexander R. Narruhn, Governor; Honorable Arno H. Kony, President of the Senate 16th Chuuk State Legislature; and Honorable Lester Danny Mersai, Speaker of the House of Representatives 16th Chuuk State Legislature.

PICRC and OPRI to conduct surveys of resources in seagrass beds and mangroves to assess potential to support blue economy

The Palau International Coral Reef Center

The Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) and the Ocean Policy Research Institute (OPRI) of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Japan are collaborating on a blue economy project to develop useful fishery resources for small islands. Palau and other small islands share the characteristics of being closed, remote, and maritime. In the past, they have relied on tourism to bring in foreign currency and ships for importing food. However, the COVID-19 pandemic cast a large shadow over the reliability of these industries. Now, policies for sustainable food production and resource management are more important.

“Naturally, fishery species are promising as the main targets for food production,” said Aquarium supervisor, Asap Bukurrou. “Last year, PICRC and OPRI conducted research that revealed undeveloped resources in seagrass beds and mangrove forests, such as mangrove crabs, mangrove clams, and white-spotted sea urchins.”

While this presents an opportunity for sustainable food production, some vital questions are currently unanswered, such as the quantities of these resources and whether they can be utilized sustainably. Technology for aquaculture also needs to be developed. For giant clams, which have established production methods, the team aims to assess wild stocks to ensure food security.



FSS Tosiwo Nakayama Patrol Boat arrives in Yap waters to enhance Micronesian maritime security

March 16, 2023

Colonia Yap - On the morning of March 16, 2023, the FSS Tosiwo Nakayama patrol boat, which is part of the Pacific Maritime Security Program, arrived in Yap waters. The boat is the 14th of 21 vessels that have been delivered to 10 Pacific Island Countries and Timor-Leste under the Pacific Maritime Security Program. It is also the first of two vessels specifically for the Federated States of Micronesia.

Commanding Officer of FSS Tosiwo Nakayama is Captain Paulino Yangitesmal a native of Yap from the island of Ifiluk. The Pacific Patrol Boat Program and Pacific Maritime Security Program are aimed at enhancing regional security by addressing illegal fishing activities and stopping human trafficking. CO Yangitesmal stated that their mission is to apprehend or seize any vessel that is not licensed to fish in our waters. FSS Tosiwo Nakayama is currently at the YFA Port and is expected to depart Yap on the afternoon of March 17, 2023, after refueling.

During a visit in January 2023, OPRI Senior Researcher Atsushi Watanabe discussed research methods with PICRC researchers, went on field visits, and interviewed fishers and state government officials in several states of Babeldaob. Now, PICRC, in collaboration with OPRI, will conduct basic surveys on the abundance and catch status of several key species. Using the results as a reference, mangrove crab and mangrove clam stocks and catches will be determined for Ngatpang State and Ngeremlengui State. For sea urchins and giant clams, both of which are thought to be declining, researchers will conduct more detailed field surveys.

“For small islands, it is very important to conduct basic research to understand the abundance of natural resources such as seagrasses and mangroves and the fishery resources within them, and to utilize them in a sustainable manner and with added value. By collaborating with PICRC, we hope to achieve results that can be shared not only with Palau, but also with other island countries in the future,” said Atsushi Watanabe.



New Pacific pesticide registration scheme announced at Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry

Pacific Community

16 March 2023

Nadi, Fiji – A newly proposed Pacific Regional Pesticide Registration Scheme is expected to pave the way for monitoring of pesticide use in the region following discussions at the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry (PWAFF) in Nadi, Fiji last week.

Agricultural scientists and representatives from agriculture ministries and private sectors, attended the PWAFF side event hosted by SPC and FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations) titled Promoting ecologically based alternatives to highly hazardous pesticides to enhance food safety and security in the Pacific region.

The Pacific Community (SPC) pest and disease advisor, Fereti Atumurirava said pesticide use in the Pacific Island countries has doubled over the last decade, a much larger increase than the global average.

“The current trend of high reliance on pesticides for agricultural production in the Pacific islands has raised many concerns among policymakers, given its impact on human health and the fragile island ecosystems,” said Atumurirava.

In Fiji alone, use of insecticides and herbicides increased 34-fold between 1992 and 2013, according to FAO. In 2014, there were 89 highly hazardous pesticides registered or available in the Pacific, including chemicals listed in Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention (such as brodifacoum, benomyl, paraquat, methomyl, bifenthrin, carbaryl, diazinon and chlorpyrifos).

“While annual import trends show an increase in pesticide use, the technical capacity to make informed registration decisions on pesticides, and to manage and control their use, is very limited. This is due to poor regulatory and compliance processes, limited technical capacity for the evaluation of pesticide risks, lack of staffing for the registration of pesticides, (agro)ecosystem sensitivity to pesticide disruption, and constraints on using personal protective equipment due to hot weather conditions,” said Atumurirava.

Under the proposed Pacific Regional Pesticide Registration Scheme (PRPRS), funded by FAO and implemented by SPC, member countries will have access to a pool of available expertise on pesticides and will strengthen their capacity to make informed decisions on pesticide registration.

This will result in effective and high-quality pesticide products being registered for use, and in the long run reduce pesticide risks on human health and the environment.

At present, Cook Islands, Kiribati and Solomon Islands have signed an MOU with SPC under the scheme.

The Head of Cook Islands Ministry of Agriculture, Temarama Anguna-Kamana says the PRPRS will help farmers and importers in the long run.

“We need a proper process in place. We are only doing this for the best of our country. This is not taking away from our farmers and importers and not providing alternatives – they do need ecologically based alternatives, and this can be made available through this partnership with SPC



and FAO.

We are happy Cook Islands have signed up for this scheme and I would recommend it to our Pacific neighbours. It is a regional project and we as a region should be part of this,” concluded Anguna-Kamana.

While sharing FAO’s technical cooperation programme on promoting ecological alternatives in the Pacific region, FAO Agriculture Officer on Plant Production and Protection (Samoa) Hemant Nitturkar said that while significant steps have been made to address pesticide management in the region and to promote more ecological approaches to pest management, most of the efforts need consolidation, especially in terms of technical capacity at the national and regional level.

“Solomon Islands has prioritized the adoption of improved technology, organic pesticides, and biological control agents to reduce pest damage and increase yields,” he said. “However, few low-risk products like biopesticides are currently registered in the Pacific and their use is limited by poor awareness, supply or simply lack of confidence in their effectiveness.”

He added that the Governments of Fiji, Samoa, and Cook Islands have acknowledged the need to update their legislative and regulatory instruments.

The Pacific Regional Pesticide Registration Scheme project is due to be launched once two more Pacific nations or territories sign up to join Cook Islands, Kiribati and Solomon Islands.

UOG collaborates with Pacific Northwest National Laboratory for renewable energy research

University of Guam

March 22, 2023

In a breakthrough collaboration for the University of Guam, a team from [Pacific Northwest National Laboratory](#) (PNNL) visited UOG on March 14. PNNL scientists are providing the local University with expertise in fundamental research towards using seawater as a potential source of energy.

The lab, based in Washington state, lays a foundation for innovations that

advance sustainable energy through decarbonization and energy storage. PNNL collaborates with academia in fundamental research and with industry to transition technologies to market.

UOG’s collaborations with PNNL are funded through the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Office of Science, Basic Energy Sciences-Reaching a New Energy Sciences Workforce (BES-RENEW) Program, and DOE’s Water Power Technologies Office (WPTO).

Fleur de Peralta, a senior advisor with the Risk & Environmental Assessment Group in PNNL’s Energy & Environment Directorate, is one of the representatives who visited UOG. De Peralta grew up in Guam.

Dr. Karl Mueller, a physical chemist, joined de Peralta during the visit. He is a Lab Fellow and Program Development Office Director for the Physical & Computational Sciences Directorate at PNNL.

The visitors toured multiple laboratories at UOG and expressed interest in knowing how PNNL can further collaborate with UOG.

The UOG team expressed willingness in hosting PNNL researchers who might want to conduct fieldwork in the Western Pacific.

UOG officials also were appreciative of the experience UOG researchers will

See continuation on next page

Welcome remarks by Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Henry Puna at the Regional Conference on Statehood and the Protection of Persons Affected by Sea Level Rise

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

27 March 2023

Nadi, Fiji

Kia Orana and Ni Sa Bula Vinaka!

1. It is my greatest honour and pleasure, as host of this event, to welcome you all to this 2023 Regional Conference on Preserving Statehood and Protecting Persons: Legal Options and Institutional Responses to the Impacts of Sea-Level Rise, in the Context of International Law.

2. At the outset, allow me to say how good it is, to see all the familiar Pacific faces in the room today, as well as online. I also extend a warm Pacific welcome to our distinguished experts, many of whom have travelled for the very first time, to our Blue Pacific. We are very excited to have you with us and thank you for making the time in your busy schedules, to contribute to this important Conference.

3. I am also pleased to acknowledge the generous funding support by the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, as well as the Pacific Community, which has made this gathering possible.

4. Ladies and gentlemen, as you are well aware, this Conference was mandated by Forum Leaders, at their 51st Annual Meeting held in Suva last July. Leaders recognised the many impacts of climate change and disaster, and their threat to the future of our people, and the statehood of many Pacific nations. Leaders noted that the complex issues of

statehood, and persons affected by sea-level rise, should be guided and informed by applicable principles and norms, of international law.

5. This Conference aims to do just that, by bringing together some of the best and leading legal minds on these issues, to help us unpack, and map a way forward.

6. This Conference also signals an important juncture in the collective mapping, understanding, and innovative thinking of our Pacific family, in relation to complex legal issues that relate to our Blue Pacific Continent.

7. We had come to this juncture and risen to the challenge once before, in 2020, where we hosted a Regional Conference like this, focused on the impacts of sea-level rise on maritime zones. That Conference paved the way for the 2021 Leaders Declaration on Persevering Maritime Zones, in the Face of Climate – Change Related Sea Level Rise (Leaders Declaration).

8. On this note, I congratulate all Members, for the great progress on the international support for the Leaders Declaration. I want to encourage, as a matter of priority, that we continue to work with urgency, to conclude negotiations on all outstanding maritime boundaries claims and zones, as per Forum Leaders' commitments.

9. The Regional Conference of 2020 was an amazing feat...and during the pandemic, no less... so I am excited to see what this Conference will lead to.

10. That challenge and opportunity to unpack, innovate, and lead on some of the most complex legal issues in the world, and in our Blue Pacific Continent, now presents itself here again, in this very room, and in the next few days here at this Regional Conference.

11. As we unpack the issues of Statehood and Persons Affected by Sea Level Rise, we must be mindful of the gravity of the task put to us.

12. The IPCC has recently released the Synthesis Report of its 6th Assessment Cycle, re-emphasising yet once again, the grim forecast on the effects that climate change, and sea-level rise, will have on our island states.

13. Therefore, our task here this week, is to collectively and courageously share our ideas, and skilfully weave a framework, that harnesses both a collective understanding, and innovative solutions, on a way forward for our region. We, on the front line of climate change, will inevitably pave the way on these complex issues.

14. On that note, in relation to climate change, let me add that we must not lose sight, and we must continue to reinforce our efforts, to keep global emissions below 1.5 degrees in accordance with the Paris Agreement. While we continue to champion a host of initiatives and developments in the Pacific, we must not lose sight of the bigger picture... climate change is an existential threat to our Pacific family... and ensuring that we keep global temperatures below 1.5 degrees, must always, remain a top priority

for us.

15. In this regard, I must commend the Governments of Vanuatu and Tuvalu, for their hosting of the recent Ministerial Dialogue on fossil fuel non-proliferation, which led to a very robust outcomes statement, that I encourage Member countries to carefully consider and support. The discussions and outcomes of the Ministerial Dialogue in Vanuatu, clearly demonstrate that our region will lead the way, on seeking a just transition away from fossil fuels, in support of our broader climate change goals.

16. As we embark on the Regional Conference today, we must be mindful that we are also paving the way on international law, and it is one of my own priorities and that of my team, to create this forum for the brilliant, seasoned and learned Pacific minds like yours, to exchange ideas and be at the forefront of the narrative in this space.

17. Let me close by saying what an exciting 4 days this Regional Conference will be, and so I strongly encourage all of you present here to fully participate and make the most of this unique opportunity.

18. Ultimately, it is you that will shape the future of your own countries, your future generations, and of our region as a collective.

19. On that note, again I am proud to welcome you and host you once again to another Regional Conference, which I truly believe will be the beginning of another ground-breaking venture.

I thank you and all the very best.

...UOG Lab

Continued from previous page

get through this new relationship with a DOE national lab. Dr. Pamela Peralta Taitano, with the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs; and Dr. Rachael Leon Guerrero, Vice Provost of Research and Sponsored Programs, are taking the administrative lead on these programs at UOG.

The DOE's Office of Science is providing \$1.695 million in BES-RENEW research funding to UOG. PNNL will receive \$555,000 for the three-year project through 2025.

Dr. John Limtiaco, an assistant professor of chemistry, takes the lead on the UOG side of the research. In addition to adding new equipment to his lab and performing collaborative research

at UOG, Limtiaco and two students will participate in a research experience at PNNL this summer. Read the previous story on this link <https://www.uog.edu/news-announcements/2022-2023/uog-joins-research-efforts-toward-harnessing-energy-from-the-sea.php>

Five UOG students will also experience PNNL research with Dr. Limtiaco during the summers of 2024 and 2025.

"Research teams from PNNL and UOG will investigate the fundamental science behind seawater electrolysis to generate hydrogen," according to Dr. Mueller. PNNL and UOG teams also discussed a second project funded with \$400,000 from DOE's WPTO.

Dr. Bastian Bentlage, Associate Professor of Bioinformatics at the UOG Marine Lab, and David Patrick Crisostomo, an Aquaculture Specialist with the Sea Grant Program, take the lead on research at UOG for the WPTO project. UOG will collaborate with PNNL and Sandia National Laboratories to assess the infrastructure, environmental and economic impacts of using ocean thermal energy conversion and wave energy conversion technologies to power a proposed Guam Aquaculture Innovation Center.



Karl Mueller, a physical chemist and a Program Development Office Director at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Washington State, seated, second from left, is joined by Fleurdeliza de Peralta, seated, third from left, a senior advisor with the lab's Risk & Environmental Assessment Group, during a visit to the University of Guam on March 14. Standing from left: Dr. Pamela Peralta, Director, Contracts and Grants at UOG; Dr. Michael Chan, Guam Community College Dean of School of Technology & Student Services; UOG Senior Vice President and Provost Dr. Anita Borja Enriquez; and Dr. Rachael Leon Guerrero, Vice Provost of Research and Sponsored Programs, UOG. Seated, first from left, Guam Community College President Mary Okada; and UOG President Thomas W. Krise, first from right.

Multi-Stakeholder Expert Groups to develop the Implementation Plan of the 2050 Strategy

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

Friday, 17 March 2023:

A regional multi-stakeholder mechanism has been set up by the Pacific Islands Forum to develop the implementation and monitoring plan for the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific continent.



Members met for its first hybrid meeting this week at the PIF Secretariat in Suva

Forum Members, development partners, CROP agencies and representatives from civil society organizations and the private sector make up the cluster

group. The Multi Stakeholder Engagement Groups (MSEG) were endorsed by the 2050 Strategy Forum Officials Sub-Committee in November 2022.

The 2050 Strategy implementation plan will seek to ensure that the processes to support the implementation of the 2050 strategy is member driven in full consultation of CROP agencies, development partners and non-state actor groups.

The implementation plan will look to ensure that the region's collective actions are responsive, aligned, and complementary to national actions and policy positions, and build on existing national and regional policy frameworks, declarations, and decisions of Leaders.

PIF Deputy Secretary General, Dr Filimon welcomed members at the first

meeting and stated the importance of the development of the implementation plan that will guide the Blue Pacific towards achieving our 2050 vision.

“This plan will ensure that due processes and guidelines together with necessary consultations are conducted so the Pacific has a roadmap going forward in the implementation of the 2050 Strategy,” said Dr Manoni.

The 2050 Strategy was endorsed by Forum Leaders in July 2022 and the Implementation and Monitoring Plan will be tabled for endorsement at the Forum Leaders Meeting to be held later this year in Cook Islands.

Education at the heart of the 2050 Strategy - Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General, Henry Puna to 2023 Conference of Pacific Education Ministers

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Mr Henry Puna

Secretary General – Pacific Islands Forum

Salutations

The Honourable Jan Tinetti, Minister of Education, Aotearoa New Zealand
Honorable Ministers of Education from across the Region

Senior Education Officials

Professor Pal Ahluwalia, Vice Chancellor - University of the South Pacific

Senior Representatives of CROP Agencies

Senior Representatives of Partner Agencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Kia Orana, Bula Vinaka and a good evening to you all.

At the outset let me register my thanks to the convenors for the invitation to say a few words this evening on an issue close to my heart. I of course refer to education.

At the outset, let me also thank the Government and people of New Zealand for hosting our Pacific family this week – especially so soon after the devastating and deadly impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle.

I also acknowledge the government and the people of New Zealand for your enduring contributions over the years to the wellbeing of the people of our Blue Pacific Continent – including, of course, with regard to education.

Many of us were educated on New Zealand based curriculums, or through New Zealand scholarships,

or in New Zealand boarding schools, technical colleges or universities. And so this evening, I believe it is important that we recognize Aotearoa New Zealand's significant contribution to the region's education over the generations.

No 2050 without Education

Honourable Ministers, last year Forum Leaders adopted the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent as our region's blueprint to work together to address our shared challenges and to achieve our common aspirations.

In the context of significant geopolitical and climate change impacts on our region, the Strategy is our approach to shape the future in the way that we want.

More specifically, it frames our regional cooperation around 7 Thematic Areas and related strategic pathways, and in my view, the most important of these areas is People Centered Development – which includes education as a central pillar.

Honourable Ministers, the placement of education at the heart of the 2050 Strategy is no accident. It is there because our Leaders recognise that education will be the most critical long-term factor in our achievement of the Strategy.

Without education and capacity development to drive economic growth, we will remain dependent on others to finance our development goals.

Without curricula that draw on the best of our traditions and cultures, we will never have the people to build climate

resilient, Pacific-relevant, societies and communities.

Without focused education, we will not have the scientists and technicians to develop the approaches we need for a just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels and toward renewables-based economies – something which a number of our Pacific Ministers called for in cyclone-struck Port Vila last week.

Without education, we will never capitalise on our immeasurable ocean-based resources including our fishery, genetic materials, minerals, and renewable energy. Indeed, without education, the promise of the blue economy will, ironically, never materialize for us, the stewards of the Pacific Ocean.

Honourable Ministers, in short, without education there can be no 2050 future, and in this respect, let me re-emphasise how important it is that you meet here this week; so that you may bring a renewed energy and focus to this important matter.

Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF)

Honourable Ministers, added to this, let me congratulate the work of the Pacific Regional Education Framework Facilitation Unit, which has been driven by the leadership of the University of the South Pacific. And moving forward, we will continue to USP's leadership in this regard, and I encourage all of us to do the same.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Global Partnership for Education, as well as the Implementing

Agencies for your support to PacREF.

As we consider the mid-term review and move into phase 2, I will ensure that PacREF is well aligned to the 2050 Strategy, to ensure coherence across our various frameworks and platforms.

Honorable Ministers, to close, I encourage you to consider how we might ensure that education drives the achievement of the objectives that we harbour as sovereign states and as a region.

For me, education is not only a development goal. It is a strategic imperative for our region if we are to reach our 2050 vision.

In this regard, I invite you to discuss how we can advance the education of our girls and boys and women and men in a way that is linked to the goals and ambitions that our leaders have set for us all.

In addition, I encourage you to remember the most vulnerable members of our community, such as persons with disabilities, those in rural and remote areas, and out of school youths, as you determine the next phase of our national and regional approaches to education. Ministers, Officials, Partners – with those few remarks, I wish you all the best in your discussions over the coming days.

As we contend with the challenges of today and tomorrow, our 2050 future must start here and now - with a reinvigorated focus and investment in education and skills building across our Blue Pacific region.

Meitaki Ma'ata and thank you all.