

Tasi Limtiaco: Putting Micronesia swimming on the map at Paris 2024

Federated States of Micronesia swimmer Tasi Limtiaco reveals how an athlete from a small island can make it to the world stage with the help of an Olympic Solidarity scholarship. As part of our series following scholarship-holders on their road to Paris, Limtiaco talks about the progress he has made since Tokyo 2020 and his hopes for the future of swimming back home.

International Olympics Committee

June 6, 2024

FSM—Growing up on Guam, an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Tasi Limtiaco was never far from water.

“I’ve always had an affinity with the water,” he says. “I’d be out there every day, swimming around. Eventually, my dad took me down to a local club to learn how to swim properly, and I really took to it. That’s how it all started.”

Limtiaco’s natural ability in the water was immediately obvious, and he quickly began to surpass his peers. It didn’t take



Photos by Jourdyn Adams

him long to reach the top and, while satisfying, it left him wanting more.

“We didn’t have the best resources,” he remembers. “I grew up practising in a 15-metre hotel pool. As I started going through the ranks and getting better and

better, there was nothing to challenge me.”

Knowing he needed to leave home to reach his full potential, Limtiaco first moved to Japan, where he trained alongside other future Olympians, before

relocating to Thailand on a FINA (World Aquatics) scholarship.

Although leaving home for unfamiliar surroundings was tough, the experience

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POPA report finds deficiencies in Sokehs Municipal Government representation funds handling in 2023

By Bill Jaynes
The Kaselehlie Press

June 17, 2024

Sokehs, Pohnpei—On June 4, 2024, the Compliance Investigation Division of the Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) released a Preliminary Review and Administrative Investigation (PRAI) on allegations of abuse and misuse of Sokehs Municipal Government representation funds in fiscal year 2023. The review showed serious deficiencies in the handling of representation funds in all three branches of the Sokehs Municipal Government during that year. The investigation was initiated after POPA received a complaint from a concerned

citizen alleging abuses of representation funds by the Sokehs Government.

The review disclosed that a total of \$24,500 was appropriated by law to finance the government’s representation accounts that year. However, an additional \$11,087.44 was reprogrammed from other government-appropriated accounts to supplement the representation accounts for a total of \$35,610.81.

In the Executive Branch, \$14,221.62 was spent, of which only \$9,000 was appropriated by law. The remainder was unilaterally reprogrammed into the representation account from other expense categories. The Legislative

Branch spent \$9,750, of which \$9,000 was appropriated. The Judiciary Branch spent \$11,612.82, only \$6,500 of which was appropriated by law.

In the Executive Branch, auditors found an instance where \$1,535 was expended for the procurement of sakau plants and sakau pohn takai. Payments totaling \$4,695 were made and issued to the Chief Magistrate without invoices or documents to support the expenditures. Another \$2,550 was spent by the Sokehs Treasurer when he was in an acting capacity as the Chief Magistrate. The Chief Magistrate reprogrammed \$1,921.37 from his fixed assets expense account and \$3,140.25 from the consumable expense account to

supplement his representation account in 2023.

In the Legislative Branch, an amount of \$3,015 was expended for the procurement of sakau plants and sakau pohn takai. An amount of \$400 was paid for a Section 4 function and \$200 for medical referral costs to the former speaker without receipts or invoices to support the expenditure. An Acting Speaker, who is now the sitting Speaker, received \$150 for a funeral contribution without any supporting documents.

In the Judiciary Branch, the records showed that the Chief Justice spent

[Click here for continuation on page 6](#)

President Simina and Micronesian Leaders conclude 26th MIF with Joint Communiqué

FSM Information Services

June 14, 2024

Guam—The 26th Micronesian Islands Forum (MIF) successfully concluded its three-day gathering on June 5, 2024 at the Hyatt Regency in Guam. The forum, held under the Governor of Guam as the Chairperson, brought together leaders from the U.S. Territory of Guam, the governments of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and its States of Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap, along with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the Republic of Palau, the Republic of Nauru, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI).

During the Forum, the MIF Principals engaged in comprehensive discussions on critical issues pertaining to economic and sustainable development in the region. In his opening statement, H.E. President Wesley W. Simina, the outgoing Chair of the MIF, underscored the Forum's focus on pivotal issues, including climate change, ocean conservation, air and digital connectivity, and workforce development. President Simina extended heartfelt gratitude to the leadership and people of Guam for their exceptional hospitality and congratulated the Governor of Guam on assuming the MIF Chairmanship. He reaffirmed the FSM's commitment to strong ties with the United States, emphasizing the Compact of Free Association as central to FSM foreign policy.

Highlighting climate change as a paramount concern, President Simina stated, "Climate change remains the

primary concern in our region; universally recognized as arguably the most significant threat facing mankind. This threat persists and its man-made causes are growing—demanding swift action." He detailed FSM's progress in climate adaptation and mitigation, including its comprehensive Third National Communication to the UNFCCC and the country's pioneering role in signing the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement.

On commitment to connectivity, President Simina outlined initiatives to enhance both air and digital connectivity, vital for overcoming the challenges of isolation. He announced the FSM's Aviation Task Force efforts to attract new airlines, improving travel options and affordability. On digital connectivity, he highlighted the East Micronesia Cable project, expected to be completed by October 2025, which will link Pohnpei to Kosrae, Nauru, and Kiribati. He also proposed regional support for connecting to the new Google cable for redundancy and improved service.

Throughout the forum, the Principals participated in roundtable discussions and received updates from various MIF Standing Committees, including Regional Workforce Development, Regional Education, Regional Health, Gender Equality, Workforce Development Council, Roundtable on Workforce Development, Regional Tourism, Committee of Trade, Regional Transportation, Ocean Committee, Roundtable on Economy, Information Communication Technology, Regional Energy, Roundtable on Digitization/Cybersecurity, Micronesia Challenge, Regional Invasive Species Council, Pacific Islands Regional Recycling Initiatives Council, and a presentation on Guam Green Growth (G3).

Recognizing the importance of a fully functional MIF, President Simina announced a pledge of \$200,000 towards the operationalization of the MIF Secretariat.

The 26th MIF concluded with the signing of the Joint Communiqué and Resolutions by the Heads of Delegations in addition to a letter to President Biden, solidifying their commitment to regional cooperation and sustainable development.



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Bill Jaynes
Managing Editor

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July 03, 2024

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

Monday, July 1, 2024

Governor Joseph leads delegation on visit to Guam's Flow Bottling Company

Pohnpei Public Information

June 6, 2024

Harmon, Guam—Governor Joseph, accompanied by key officials from Pohnpei Utilities Corporation (PUC) and the Department of Resources and Development, visited the Flow Bottling Company in Harmon, Guam on the margins of the 26th Micronesian Islands Forum. The delegation included Nixon Anson, CEO of PUC, Erick Paul, Chairman of the PUC Board, Mark Kostka, Director of Resources and Development, and Gardner Edgar, PUC Board member. The visit marks a significant step in ongoing negotiations aimed at establishing a water bottling facility in Pohnpei.

The delegation toured the Flow Bottling Company facility with owner Deepak (Don) Dewan, observing the entire process of water filtration and bottling. The tour provided a comprehensive view of the advanced technology and rigorous quality control measures employed by Flow Bottling Company. A detailed presentation was followed by a Q&A session, where the Pohnpei officials engaged with experts to gain deeper insights into the operations and management of a successful water bottling enterprise.

Governor Joseph expressed his satisfaction with the progress made by PUC in exploring this venture. He emphasized that establishing a water bottling facility and water purification systems in Pohnpei aligns with State Law 5L-120-03, to engage in the marketing and sale of potable water to destinations outside of the state of Pohnpei; Provided that any revenues from the costs of exporting the water will be devoted to subsidizing the rates charged for piped

water and sanitation services provided by PUC to the residents of Pohnpei.

As PUC prepares to implement the State Law for exports only there is a strong sense of optimism about the potential benefits of this project. PUC is moving forward and partnering

with Flow Bottling Company to assist with implementing this project. The Pohnpei State Government is committed to providing regular updates on the progress of these negotiations and the potential establishment of the water bottling facility.




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FSM elected Vice President of the General Assembly

FSM Permanent Mission to the United Nations

June 6, 2024

New York—Today the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) elected 16 Vice Presidents, including the Federated States of Micronesia, to serve at its 79th session, lasting from September 2024 until September 2025. The Vice-Presidents are nominated by the UN regional groups and Micronesia is one of five countries representing the Asia-Pacific region.

The Vice Presidents of the General Assembly are chosen to serve by country rather than by individual. However, it is often the duty of the Permanent Representative to serve in that capacity. Duties include chairing of meetings in the absence of the President of the General Assembly (PGA) and participating in meetings of the General Committee, which oversees the General Assembly's agenda. This is Micronesia's first time to be elected as a Vice President or to any high-level position at the United Nations since attaining membership in the organization in 1991.



Governor Stevenson A. Joseph signs Joint Communique at 26th Micronesian Islands Forum

Pohnpei Public Information

June 5, 2024

Agana Heights, Guam—Governor Stevenson A. Joseph has officially signed the joint communique and accompanying resolutions at the 26th Micronesian Islands Forum, joining hands with President Wesley W. Simina, Governor Alexander R. Naruhn of Chuuk, Governor Tulensa Palik of Kosrae, Governor Lou Leon Guerrero of Guam, Lt. Governor Itimai of Yap and other distinguished Micronesian leaders. The signing marks the culmination of this year's forum, an annual sub-regional event dedicated to collaboration and cooperation in

addressing shared challenges and strengthening relationships among the Micronesian states.

The joint communique and accompanying resolutions underscore the leaders' commitment to working together on critical issues such as climate change, invasive species, economic development, gender equity and regional transportation. The forum continues to serve as a vital platform for dialogue and collective action among the Micronesian nations.

Governor Joseph expressed his gratitude for the spirit of unity and mutual support demonstrated during the forum,

emphasizing the importance of solidarity in facing the region's unique challenges. In his closing remarks, Governor Joseph called for action to implement the plans started and to remind the Leaders the only reason why they are sitting in their seats, are the people who put them there.

The next meeting of the Micronesian Islands Forum is scheduled to take place in Majuro, in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, where leaders will continue their efforts to foster regional cooperation and development.



Ambassador Kagomiya pays a courtesy call on T.H. Gardenia Aisek, Secretary of the Department of Education of the FSM



Embassy of Japan to the FSM

June 7, 2024

Pohnpei—On June 7, 2024, Ambassador Kagomiya paid a courtesy call on T.H. Gardenia Aisek, Secretary of the Department of Education of the FSM. T. H. secretary Aisek expressed her appreciation for the Government of Japan for its assistance to education in the FSM, such as the scholarship provided by the Government of Japan and volunteer teachers dispatched by JICA.

Ambassador Kagomiya agreed on the idea that education is a critical investment for nation development in the long term and emphasized that the Government of Japan will further strengthen its cooperation education in the FSM.

Governor Stevenson A. Joseph welcomes FBI Special Agents and U.S. Embassy Official

Pohnpei Public Information

June 12, 2024

Kolonia, Pohnpei—Governor Stevenson A. Joseph received a courtesy call from Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mr. Trey Lewis, Mike Adames, Tim Hollister, and Mr. Paul Findley, Political Officer, from the U.S. Embassy Kolonia today. The visit included a briefing on ongoing mentoring

and training activities facilitated by the FBI and the Embassy within the FSM National Government and Pohnpei State. This initiative underscores the collaborative efforts between Pohnpei State and U.S. federal agencies to enhance local law enforcement capabilities.

During the meeting, the Special Agents and Embassy Official outlined the various training programs currently in progress and shared information about upcoming training opportunities available for the Pohnpei State Police and the Attorney General's Office. These programs aim to strengthen the skills and competencies of local law enforcement personnel, ensuring they are well-equipped to handle emerging challenges.

Governor Joseph expressed his gratitude for the continued support and



commitment demonstrated by the FBI and the U.S. Embassy. He highlighted the importance of these training sessions in bolstering the effectiveness and efficiency of the Pohnpei State Police and the Attorney General's Office. Governor Joseph specifically requested the inclusion of cyber security training, recognizing the growing threat of cybercrime and the need for specialized skills to combat it.

In closing, Governor Joseph emphasized the significance of maintaining open communication and awareness of the visits and training activities. He noted that optimizing the scheduling and coordination of these sessions would maximize their impact and benefit to Pohnpei State. The Governor looks forward to the ongoing partnership and the positive outcomes it will bring to the safety and security of the community.

First Yoga seminar at COM-FSM inspires both students and their teacher

By *Bill Jaynes*
The Kaselehlie Press

June 13, 2024

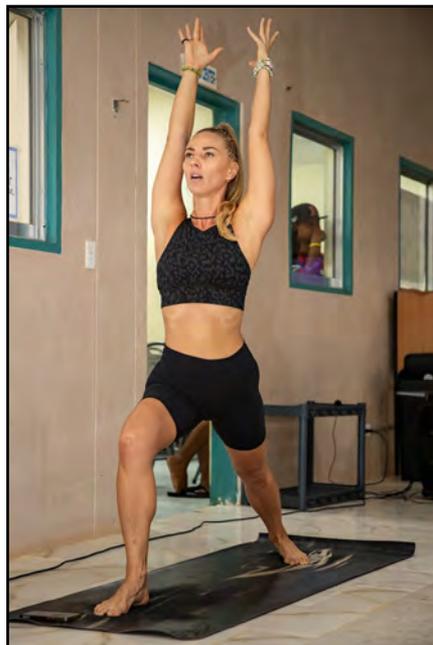
Pohnpei—This afternoon, Valentina Bit, a Vladivostok native who speaks four languages and has been a resident of Pohnpei for the last 11 years, led a yoga seminar for students at the College of Micronesia-FSM Kolonia Campus. She mentioned that she was told it was the first time a yoga seminar had been offered at the school. She is in talks to conduct more seminars for the students at the school as well as outreaches through COM to other schools in Pohnpei.

The seminar was linked to the International Day of Yoga, which is on June 21. However, two days after the class, Bit traveled to her family’s home to aid her ailing father. The class was not for credit and was not mandatory, but approximately 50 students gathered in the COM Daini gym for the seminar. Though not all the students who were present participated, most did and tried their best to follow the moves that Bit demonstrated. There were occasional titters and a fair amount of embarrassment, but for the most part, the students happily tried to follow along.

Bit, now 37 years old, said in a later interview that she has been practicing yoga since she was 23. After some coaxing from others in Pohnpei who were also interested in yoga, she decided to take things a step further during the COVID pandemic border closure. “I thought, I need to become a teacher because I am good at it.” She enrolled in a course to train yoga trainers with her “yoga guru,” who was her teacher when she initially fell in love with yoga.



She now has internationally recognized certification as a 200-hour yoga instructor. She is the only certified yoga instructor



in the FSM, an achievement that has presented her with numerous potential opportunities for both teaching and studying, though she has never charged to teach yoga.

Because of her status as the only certified yoga instructor in the FSM, she said that the Embassy of India offered her the opportunity to apply for a grant to go to India to learn and study yoga. The invitation is very recent, and she plans to apply for the grant. Bit has traveled extensively and said that in whatever country she visits, she seeks out more training, most recently studying in “Ayurveda,” a 5,000-year-old Indian medicine practice based in yoga that includes massage therapy.

“It’s not something I profit from or use for my own purposes,” she said. “I genuinely want to help people. I know how to do it. And it’s coming from a place of doing something good, and it feels so good inside. It’s not, ‘I’m just showing up to work and I’m just doing something.’ I genuinely feel I serve my purpose. And that’s what I felt when I taught the class at COM. It just felt so good. I know what I’m doing. I know I’m doing it well. I can share it. And if at least one student from the class takes something out of it, that will be the biggest fruition, the biggest achievement for me.”

She is currently taking part in yoga instruction classes leading to certification for an additional 300 hours. When she earns that certification, it will be the highest level a yoga instructor can formally obtain.

Yoga is “a very holistic approach that

is very, very simple but has a massive effect,” she said. “So, I constantly study and develop and grow. Yoga is such a field where you can never reach the top; it’s a path that is as long as life. Very interestingly, once I learn something new, I always come across various people that introduce a new level of knowledge.”

Though only in her late 30s, Valentina has had a diverse professional background. “I used to work at Mercedes-Benz. I used to work at Kino, a heavy-duty truck company, the Japanese distributor. So, I was making good money. Then I worked for a Russian oligarch, and I was making very good money. That’s how I came here the very first time, as a tourist. Then I moved here and started to work at Pohnpei Surf Club, and I downshifted a lot. I went from buying Gucci and Prada to counting money to see if I had enough to buy juice at Yoshi, but the lifestyle, you know? I was like, ‘Why do I need to stress about money when I don’t really need much?’”

Valentina admits that she will likely never make a living with yoga in Pohnpei, but she hopes to continue to help. “I love the island and its people, and I love to share what I know about the island with others so they can see the island is absolutely beautiful and the nature is insane here,” she said.

“Some people never find their purpose, and again, when I was teaching the class at COM, I was like, ‘I’m doing what I’m supposed to do.’ And that’s an awesome feeling, you know? To be in the right place and all that, and I’m in the right place and doing the right thing.”

Governor Steveson A. Joseph attends 73rd commencement at PICS High School and shares vision of High Schools in each municipality

Pohnpei Public Information

June 12, 2024

Pohnpei, FSM—Governor Steveson A. Joseph attended the 73rd commencement exercises of PICS High School at PICS Field. The event celebrated the achievements of the graduating class, marking a significant milestone in their educational journey. The keynote address was delivered by Reed B. Oliver, former and 7th Governor of Pohnpei and an alumnus of PICS High School.

Inspiring speeches were delivered by class Salutatorian Kapualani S. Paiden who shared Proverbs 3:5-6, to trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understanding, and class Valedictorian, Miyuki Jean Joseph, who spoke of resilience, determination, gratitude, and courage and to pay it forward.

In his keynote speech, former Governor Oliver imparted wisdom to the graduates, emphasizing the importance of choosing friends wisely. He compared friendships to elevators, highlighting how they can either elevate or bring one down. Oliver urged the graduates to contribute to the future of FSM and Pohnpei, stressing the nation's need for their talents and dedication. He concluded his speech by instilling three core virtues in the students: Respect, Responsibility, and Honesty.

Governor Joseph, in his special remarks, echoed the sentiments of the keynote address, praising it as comprehensive and inspiring. He reminded the graduates of the sacrifices their parents made for their education and how

today's decisions shape tomorrow's outcomes. Governor Joseph encouraged the graduates to identify their passions early to guide their future endeavors, assuring them that faith in God would provide strength in their journeys.

Governor Joseph concluded his address with a historical reflection on PICS, noting its legacy as the Pacific Islands Central School, which influenced many lives throughout Micronesia, producing past Presidents and Governors. He shared a vision for the future, proposing the establishment of high schools in each municipality to promote ownership, responsibility, and friendly competition, ultimately fostering excellence across the island.



...Sokehs

Continued from front page

\$4,654.82 for the purchase of sakau plants, pwoatoal en sakau, and sakau pohn takai. This is about 40% of the total of \$11,615.82 appropriated for representation funds for the Chief Justice. A total amount of \$4,815.85 (41%) was paid to the Chief Justice as reimbursements based on receipts/invoices produced and submitted by the Chief Justice himself during the fiscal year. All requests were supported by invoices payable to the Chief Justice personally.

Auditors concluded that the Sokehs Government had “significant internal control deficiencies, weaknesses, and failures exist in the SMG management and administration of its representation funds/accounts in fiscal year 2023.” POPA recommended that the Sokehs Municipal Government establish a limit on how much an allottee of government funds can reprogram between budgeted expense accounts as part of the annual appropriation law.

On documentary evidence, it said, “The lack of documentary evidence to support SMG representation funds expenditures during the year should be a major concern to all... Every time an allottee uses personal funds for an official function, the allottee must make sure that receipts or invoices are secured from the seller of goods and services to support payments for proper accountability and transparency. Receipts for goods and services directly provided by the allottee's own personal supplies, i.e., sakau, yam, pig, etc., are considered acceptable.”

In addition to the Pohnpei Attorney General, the report and its findings were copied to the Sokehs Nanwahrki, the Governor, Speaker, and Director of the Department of Treasury and Administration of the Pohnpei State government, and all members of the Sokehs Municipal Council.

...Tasi

Continued from front page

has made Limtiaco not just a better swimmer, but a better person.

“Putting myself into those uncomfortable situations pushed me to be better, not just in swimming, but every aspect of life,” he explains. “Swimming is such a technical sport. You constantly have to be learning and willing to evolve, and different experiences help you do that.”

From Tokyo to grabbing medals at the Pacific Games

Receiving an Olympic Solidarity scholarship ahead of Tokyo 2020 helped Limtiaco make his Olympic debut, competing in the 200m individual medley. Representing his country on the biggest stage was a surreal experience for the Micronesian.

“I was really nervous,” he admits. “But to be able to stand up there with the other Olympians, it’s a feeling that I can’t put into words.”

Following his Olympic bow, Limtiaco has since moved his base to San Diego, a change that was

made possible with the renewal of his Olympic Solidarity scholarship, which has provided crucial funding on his road to Paris 2024.

“Commuting back and forth to meets, paying team fees, buying new gear – it’s not cheap. Racing suits are probably the biggest expense we have as swimmers, and the funding has helped me out with that. It’s also allowed me to travel to some meets that I wouldn’t have been able to attend previously. I know some athletes who have had to pick up multiple jobs just to support themselves, but the Olympic Solidarity funding has helped me focus on my training.”

Limtiaco is already reaping the benefits of his new home, putting in a historic performance at the 2023 Pacific Games where he won three gold medals – the first ever for the Federated States of Micronesia – and a silver to top things off.

“For me, one of my biggest goals is putting Micronesia on the map, and winning those gold medals was a big step towards that,” he says. “It also showed me that I haven’t peaked yet, that I can keep getting better and I just need to keep pushing.”



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Joint Task Force Micronesia holds Assumption of Command Ceremony

*By U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
Joint Task Force-Micronesia Public
Affairs*

ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam—Adm. Samuel J. Paparo, commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, presided over the establishment ceremony of Joint Task Force-Micronesia (JTF-M) at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam on June 14, 2024, where Rear Adm. Gregory C. Huffman assumed command.

Today’s milestone highlights the significance of the first two-star command in the region in more than seventy years.

“Defending this homeland through the vision of the Guam Defense System, commanded and controlled by Joint Task Force – Micronesia is my number one priority. This joint area of operations is critical terrain that enables the success of delivering integrated deterrence,” said Paparo. “By ensuring our joint force and our

joint capabilities are in the right place at the right time, we are able to deliver strong deterrence to prevent conflict. Its strategic importance cannot be overstated.”

Huffman’s role as the Senior Military Officer in the region, will emphasize the Department of Defense’s support to our pacing challenge throughout the region, and bolster relationships with our Allies and partner nations in the joint operating area.

The JTF-M joint operating area will include U.S. territories (Guam, The Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, and Wake Island) and the Freely Associated States, comprised of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.

“Our team thinks, acts, and operates differently, while continuing to be an innovative force that deters aggression. Our adversaries will see our accomplishments in the region, and they will see our commitment to strengthening relationships with our neighbors in the region,” said Huffman. “They will see how our military emphasizes a collaborative vision with our Allies and partners that prioritizes stability and a free and open Indo-Pacific region.”

Huffman, the son of a career naval officer and a 1989 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, brings a wealth of insight to the role, based on his experience as the recent Commander of Joint Region Marianas.

The mission of the JTF-M is to synchronize operations and activities across all domains, enabling a robust warfighting posture, while enhancing partner nation capacity. The Task Force will promote regional stability, provide homeland defense, Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA), and foreign humanitarian assistance through a whole of government approach.



The FSM welcomes new Finnish ambassador

FSM information Services

June 13, 2024

Pohnpei—The Federated States of Micronesia was pleased to welcome Her Excellency Tanja Jääskeläinen, the new Ambassador of the Republic of Finland to the FSM. In a ceremony held on May 29th, the Ambassador presented her letter of credence to His Excellency President Wesley W. Simina, officially marking her accreditation and the beginning of a new chapter in FSM-Finnish relations. Ambassador Jääskeläinen was accompanied by her spouse, Mr. Jukka Jääskeläinen, and was warmly received by FSM officials.

In his welcoming remarks, President Simina expressed his gratitude for the Ambassador's dedication and the significant efforts made to formalize her accreditation through this visit. He highlighted the long-standing mutual interest between the FSM and Finland, formalized in 2010, to "promote mutual understanding and consolidate relations of friendship and cooperation."

President Simina emphasized the importance of this accreditation, which opens opportunities for continued dialogue and cooperation on various fronts including community-based development initiatives, environmental conservation, safe water management, renewable energy, and practical climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. These areas are critical for the FSM's development and align closely with Finland's priorities, including the rights and status of women and girls, sustainable economies, quality education, peace, democracy, and the sustainable use of natural resources.

President Simina expressed optimism for productive engagements in these areas through Ambassador Jääskeläinen's tenure. As both nations are committed members of the United Nations, the FSM anticipates Finland's support in global discussions, particularly those concerning Small Island Developing States and climate change.

Ambassador Jääskeläinen shared that she looks forward to deepening the already good and friendly bilateral relations between the FSM and Finland and that



both countries share many common values and principles. The Ambassador also highlighted their shared concern and priority of addressing climate change and protecting biodiversity, as Finland is located on a peninsula with many of its people deriving their livelihoods from the sea.

President Simina and Ambassador

Jääskeläinen further continued their dialogue in a one on one exchange following the ceremony where they continued discussions on bilateral cooperation.

The FSM government extends its congratulations to Ambassador Jääskeläinen and looks forward to a fruitful partnership in the years ahead.

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Governor Stevenson A. Joseph attends Nanpei Memorial High School Graduation Ceremony

Pohnpei Public Information

June 11, 2024

Palikir, Pohnpei—Governor Stevenson A. Joseph proudly attended the Nanpei Memorial High School graduation ceremony, held at the COM-FSM China Friendship gym in Palikir. The ceremony celebrated the achievements of 93 graduating students, each of whom successfully passed the COM-FSM entrance exam, marking a significant milestone in their academic journey.

The event featured Kitti Senator Mrs. Herolyn Semes Movick from the 11th Pohnpei Legislature as the keynote speaker. Senator Movick emphasized a holistic approach to education, highlighting that it does not solely commence within the school walls. She praised the students for their perseverance and success in reaching this pivotal moment. She encouraged the graduates to seize the abundant opportunities available today, underscoring that both change and failure can serve as powerful catalysts for future success.



In his special remarks, Governor Joseph echoed Senator Movick's sentiments, reinforcing the concept that education begins at home. He expressed his gratitude to the parents, principals, and teachers, acknowledging their vital role in the students' educational achievements. The Governor asked them to stand, and the audience recognized their dedication and support with a warm round of applause. He encouraged the students to choose carefully and with the advice of parents and teachers what they will do next in their journey, reminding them that they are the future of Pohnpei.



The graduation ceremony was a momentous occasion, filled with pride and optimism for the future. Governor Joseph's presence and Senator Movick's inspiring words resonated deeply with the graduates, encouraging them to

embrace their educational journey and the opportunities that lie ahead. The Pohnpei State Government remains committed to supporting the holistic development of its students, ensuring a brighter future for all.

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 Email: trademarks@munroleyslaw.com.fj
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MUNRO LEYS

Australia funded project in Chuuk

Australian Embassy to the FSM

June 8, 2024

Chuuk—While in Chuuk, Ambassador Jenny Grant-Curnow met with the team from Major Projects Foundation (MPF). In partnership the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme - SPREP and MPF are working on the Australian-funded FSM WWII Shipwreck Pollution Mitigation Project, aiming to address oil spill risks from potentially polluting wrecks in the Chuuk Lagoon.

The MPF, Chuuk State Historic Preservation Office (HPO) and Chuuk -Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) teams are collaborating to complete a technical survey of the top 20 shipwrecks

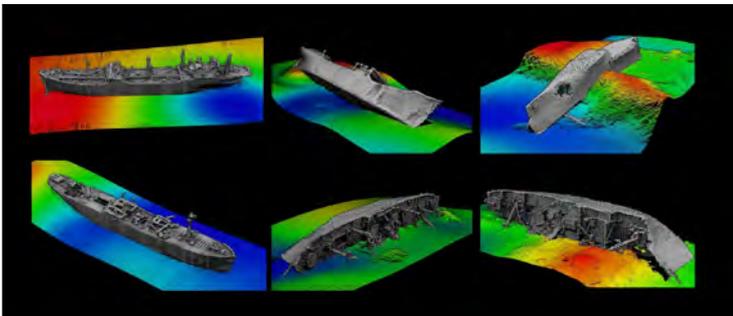
that threaten the environment, livelihoods, and culture of the Chuukese people.

In Chuuk Governors remarks “Ocean is our life, if we lose it, we will lose our identity forever.”

The completion of the survey will take place later in 2024. These surveys are the first to assess the condition of these wrecks and the pollution risk they pose. This critical information will provide the foundation for prioritizing future remediation efforts.

We also visited the Chuuk hyperbaric chambers that has been operating for 20 years saving the lives of an estimated 250 people.

We thank the dedicated teams who are working tirelessly to maintain the chambers.



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The FSM welcomes new ambassador from Kosovo

FSM Information Services

June 13, 2024

Pohnpei--The Federated States of Micronesia recently welcomed Ambassador Sabri Kiçmari as the new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kosovo to the FSM. The presentation of credentials ceremony was held on May 30th, 2024, marking the formal accreditation of Ambassador Kiçmari to the FSM.

In his address, President Simina expressed his gratitude for Ambassador Kiçmari's visit to the FSM, noting the significance of his formal accreditation. This occasion underscores the strengthening relationship between the FSM and Kosovo, which began with the establishment of diplomatic relations in September 2013 through a joint communiqué endorsed by their respective ambassadors in Washington, D.C. at the time.

President Simina highlighted the shared values and mutual respect that have characterized the FSM-Kosovo relationship since its inception. He reflected on the political growth and maturity achieved by both nations and emphasized the importance of continuing to build on this foundation as they enter a new chapter in their bilateral relations.

In accepting Ambassador Kiçmari's



credentials, President Simina expressed appreciation for Kosovo's commitment to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. He reiterated the FSM's readiness to work closely with Kosovo to further their common interests and to strengthen the ties between their peoples.

In his remarks Ambassador Kiçmari expressed his commitment to deepening Kosovo's relationship with the FSM and that despite the geographical distance, both countries are united by common values such as democracy, freedom, equality among states and respect for the individual. The Ambassador highlighted climate change, global health and cyber security and education as areas for further cooperation and stated that he looked forward to building on the strong and friendly relations between the FSM and Kosovo.

President Simina closed by extending his congratulations to Ambassador Kiçmari and welcoming him as a friend and partner to the FSM.

President Simina and Ambassador Kiçmari followed up on the ceremony with a meeting where they continued discussions on areas of potential cooperation including diplomatic and law enforcement training, education opportunities, and the recent establishment of the FSM embassy in Geneva which opens the opportunity for the FSM Ambassador to become cross-accredited to friends in Europe, such as Kosovo.

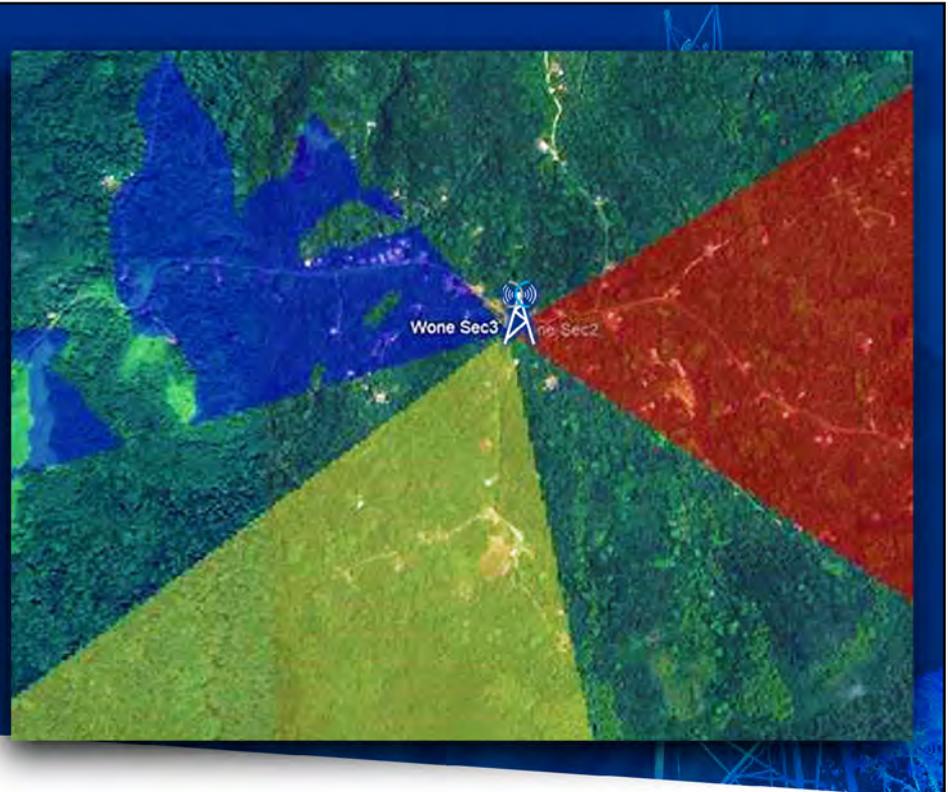
The FSM government looks forward to a productive and collaborative relationship with Ambassador Kiçmari and the Republic of Kosovo.

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Ambassador Kagomiya attends a workshop on the Nukuoro Culture

Embassy of Japan to the FSM

June 3, 2024

Kolonia, Pohnpei—On June 3, 2024, Ambassador Kagomiya attended the Nukuoro Language and Cultural Conservation Workshop Opening Ceremony held by Nukuoro Documentation Initiative Inc., at the town of Kolonia, Pohnpei. Nukuoro is one of ethnic groups of the FSM, an ethnically heterogeneous country. The participants of the ceremony including researchers from Hawaiian and German University discussed topics including preservation of Nukuoro language through creating a language curriculum and other various ways and listing and preserving Nukuoro cultural heritage collections in museums all over the World.



U.S. Army welcomes new enlistees

U.S. Embassy to the FSM

June 14, 2024

Pohnpei—The United States Army welcomed twenty-one (21) Pohnpeian young men and women who were sworn into the U.S. Armed Forces in an enlistment ceremony at Pohnpei Track-and-Field on June 11, 2024.

These enlistees include: Jerishameri Benjamin, Gordon Eldridge, Melody James, Bravo John, Ysamrelda Ladore,

Kevin Leon, Yzavyyette Etwet, JR Henly, Casey Pelep, Marrchinette Suzuki, Emi Suzuki, Tom Lebehn, Giovanni Rodriquez, Carter Sohs, Ikaika Anson, Perick Hadley, Falemon Hainrick, Nanet Joab, Ritarsky Torres, Bryden Wichilyal, and Smylin Requemai.

This enlistment reaffirms the strong collaborative partnership between the United States and the Federated States of Micronesia. Through the Compact

of Free Association, the new enlistees are eligible for higher education and other military G.I benefits. They also have an opportunity to acquire career and technical expertise while serving in the military.

The oath of enlistment was conducted by Staff Sergeant James Smith and Captain Timothy DeJesus. U.S. Ambassador Jennifer Johnson congratulated the new enlistees at the conclusion of the ceremony.



PICS seniors graduate from Micronesian Leadership Youth Academy

U.S. Embassy to the FSM

June 14, 2024

U.S. Embassy Kolonia hosted a graduation ceremony for the Micronesian Youth Leadership Academy (MYLA) at Pohnpei State gym on June 5, 2024.

There were nine PICS High School seniors who participated in a nine-month academy training that ran from September last year to June this year and is facilitated by the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Veterans of Pohnpei Association (USVPA) in partnership with Pohnpei State Department of Education.

Members of the embassy's Defense Attache Office (DAO) and USVPA worked with Pohnpei State Department of Education to build the academy, which is a training program consisting of weekly academic skills and physical training aimed at improving military ASVAB scores, community service, leadership skills, and physical activities.

The team also met with former Governor Reed Oliver last year where they discussed the expansion of MYLA in Pohnpei. Following their discussion, high school students enrolled in MYLA and participated in field trainings directed by U.S. Embassy personnel including Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion.

The purpose of this program is to teach high school students the skills that will enable them to become the leaders of tomorrow – skills that specifically focus on academic and leadership attributes, community development, and life skills. Upon completion of all training requirements, the students finally graduated in the presence of their families and friends.

Joining the ceremony were Director of Education Stanley Etse, members of the U.S. Embassy Defense Attache Office, USVPA representative, and families and friends of the graduates.

These graduates include:

Justina Amaraich	Aikman Ligorio
Amaryssa Amaraich	Kafehlu Kapier
Chrystalmae Amaraich	Fredkilaafwa Helgenberger
Erminda Amaraich	Deo Theodore
Nicole Joab	



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Operation Irensia: A new chapter in Pacific maritime cooperation

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

June 10, 2024

SANTA RITA, Guam — In a display of regional unity and maritime prowess, U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia and Base Guam hosted the inaugural Operation Irensia from June 3-9, 2024, at Apra Harbor, Guam.

This landmark event, the successful inaugural Operation Irensia, was a testament to the unity and cooperation among Pacific Island nations and allied forces. It also coincided with World Oceans Week. The culmination of two years of meticulous planning and coordination, the operation brought together the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Australia in a shared commitment to preserving the security and prosperity of the Pacific region.

Operation Irensia, meaning 'heritage' in Chamorro, symbolizes a shared commitment to preserving the security and prosperity of the Pacific region through enhanced interoperability and cooperative engagement. The operation featured participants from the Republic of Palau with their Guardian-class Patrol Boat (GPB) PSS President HI Remeliik II (001) and the Federated States of Micronesia with their GPB FSS Bethwel Henry (P902) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands with their Pacific-class RMIS Lomor (03), alongside the USCGC Oliver Henry (WPC 1140) and USCGC Frederick Hatch (WPC 1143), and members of Forces Micronesia and Base Guam.

"Operation Irensia showcases our collective capabilities and strengthens the bonds between our nations. This initiative, two years in the making, is a testament to our enduring commitment to the Pacific region. We are grateful to all our partners and eager for this to become an annual event, continuing to foster a legacy of collaboration and security," said Capt. Robert Kistner, commander of U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia, expressing his enthusiasm for the

success of the operation and its future potential.

The operation featured a robust week of activities, including an opening ceremony, a law enforcement and mock boarding subject matter exchange, a series of competitive seamanship and damage control events, various social gatherings such as a beach BBQ and basketball tournament, and multiple underway days for practical at-sea exercises. These activities enhance interoperability and strengthen partnerships among the participating Pacific maritime forces.

The operation would not have been possible without the strong support of the Royal Australian Navy and the Australian Pacific Maritime Security Program, which played a pivotal role in facilitating the participation of various nations, including logistics, and providing mentorship to the crews involved.

"We are thrilled to collaborate with our partner, the U.S. Coast Guard, to bring Operation Irensia to life," said Dr Liz Brierley, assistant secretary of the Pacific Maritime Branch from the Australian Department of Defence. "The operation provides the opportunity to support our Pacific partners in building their capability, increasing interoperability, and strengthening regional maritime security."

"We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the nations and agencies that have turned Operation Irensia from a concept into a reality," added Captain Kistner. "Their willingness, dedication, and cooperation have set a high standard for future engagements and pave the way for a secure, unified Pacific. We also extend a deep thank you to the U.S. Navy and Naval Base Guam for assisting us in being gracious hosts through their port operations support."

The success of Operation Irensia underscores its significant role in enhancing regional maritime security. It clearly demonstrates the ongoing commitment of the U.S. and its allies to maintaining peace and stability in the Pacific region.



Pacific Island atolls fixed on water security

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

June 4, 2024

Majuro, Marshall Islands—Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face significant challenges in maintaining freshwater supply, with heavy reliance on ground water from shallow coastal aquifers, and rainwater, to meet their freshwater needs. These important coastal aquifers are however vulnerable to various threats including saltwater intrusion, over-extraction, coastal erosion, and land-use activities, which in turn are compounded by climate change.

Recognising the critical role of these aquifers in climate adaptation, the Managing Coastal Aquifers (MCA) project, that is implemented by the Pacific Community (SPC) and implemented in Tuvalu, Palau and the Marshall Islands, focuses on enhancing the understanding, management, and protection of coastal aquifers to ensure long-term water security.

SPC, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), hosted the fifth Regional Steering Committee for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded - MCA project, in Majuro, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) from May 13 to 17 2024.

The meeting brought together implementing government agency partners from Palau, Tuvalu, and RMI, alongside UNDP and SPC partners, to report on the project progress and chart future activities aimed at supporting the targeted communities.

While giving the keynote address, RMI's Minister-In-Assistance to the President and Environment, Honourable Bremity Lakjohn, highlighted the seriousness of water scarcity in island atolls, which are most impacted during drought periods.

“As low-lying atoll nations, we share unique challenges. Our population is small, but our geographic area is vast and remote. Our economy is small, logistical costs high, which when considered together create serious barriers to investment at scale. Therefore, the MCA project plays an important role to increase water security and resilience,” said Hon. Lakjohn.

He added, “I hope that this meeting can help to highlight the progress we have all made to date and, equally as important, what is yet to be done to protect groundwater resources from deterioration as well as boost the resilience of the water supply in the outlying atolls and islands.

“We cannot do it alone. We must continue with our partners to deliver not just studies and regional workshops, but also visible results in local communities,” said Hon. Lakjohn.

Sharing similar sentiments was Ms Yemesrach Workie, the Deputy Resident Representative, United Nations Development Programme Pacific Office in Fiji, who discussed significant progress updates since MCA's last meeting in November 2023, reassuring the project's commitment to improve water security across SIDS.

She added, “In Tuvalu, RMI and Palau, pre-consultations for the water gallery works are underway. This includes formalising working arrangements for internal storage, material shipment, and construction. Particularly in Tuvalu, consent has been obtained from Nanumea Kaupule (island council) for the construction of the water gallery.”

“Our aim is to accelerate implementation, to ensure beneficiaries, both men and women receive the essential and precious gift of water. Simultaneously, promoting equal knowledge and capacity building, fair participation and fostering sustainable water management,” said Ms. Workie.

Consequently, the one-week agenda focused on fostering practical and interactive discussions aimed at enabling participants to reflect on past experiences, identify emerging challenges, and cultivate innovative solutions in managing coastal aquifers.

In a scheduled field trip, participants visited Laura, a community located in the West of Majuro Atoll, living above an important groundwater source which supports their own community with fresh water and also provides water for approximately 20,000 people in Majuro during times of drought. The Marshall Islands Environmental Protection Authority (RMIEPA) supports implementation work carried out by the MCA project in RMI.

Other substantive discussions that took place focused on Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) initiatives to be incorporated into project actions such as development of GESI sensitive groundwater education and awareness products to enable island communities of all ages to better understand and engage in water resource management.



SPC's Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division Deputy Director, Exsley Taloiburi, reiterated the importance of collaboration and partnerships, which makes the implementation of the MCA project possible across the island atolls.

“Our work requires the support of local communities, island government representatives, relevant national government agencies responsible for water supply, disaster risk management, health, meteorological services and others. Our work in the region has shown that taking an inclusive engagement approach will ensure no one is left behind,” said Mr Taloiburi.

He added, “If we allow collective action to be the beacon of our determination, we can deliver a successful MCA project outcome in our three atoll countries.”

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Pohnpei Governor Stevenson A. Joseph engages in key dialogue on UN Global Digital Compact at 26th Micronesian Islands Forum



Pohnpei Public Information

June 4, 2024

Tumon, Guam—Governor Stevenson A. Joseph of Pohnpei State, along with other distinguished leaders from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), participated in a significant meeting on the sidelines of the 26th Micronesian Islands Forum. The meeting, held with UN Resident Coordinator Jaap Van Hierden, centered on the UN Global Digital Compact, an initiative aiming to establish an inclusive global framework to ensure that digital technologies are used responsibly and for the benefit of all.

This introductory session, although brief, was highly informative. Mr. Van Hierden provided a broad overview of the UN Global Digital Compact's objectives, emphasizing the critical need for global cooperation in the digital age. The compact aims to promote inclusive digital governance and ensure that advancements in technology benefit all individuals, particularly in underserved regions. The presentation underscored the potential of digital technologies to enhance education, healthcare, and economic development globally.

The meeting also highlighted the World Bank funded FSM National Government's Digital Project,

illustrating the importance of digitizing government services for improved efficiency, safety, and public benefit. Governor Joseph, along with Governor Narruhn of Chuuk, Governor Palik of Kosrae, Lt. Governor Itimai of Yap, and Secretary of the FSM Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, Carlson Apis, discussed how the FSM Digital Project aligns with the principles of the UN Global Digital Compact. The initiative aims to provide secure and efficient digital services to the citizens of Micronesia, enhancing accessibility and reliability.

Governor Joseph expressed his commitment to furthering the dialogue and collaboration initiated in this meeting. He underscored the importance of integrating Pohnpei and the broader FSM into the global digital framework to ensure a responsible and inclusive digital future. The Governor reiterated the necessity of continuing to leverage digital technologies for the benefit of all citizens, thereby contributing to a more connected and equitable world.



Governor Joseph attends Madolenihmw High School Graduation Ceremony



Pohnpei Public Information

June 10, 2024

Pohnlangas, Madolenihmw—Pohnpei State Governor Stevenson A. Joseph attended the Madolenihmw High School graduation ceremony held at Pohnlangas Gym. The event was further honored by the presence of Wasahi Madolenihmw, adding a distinguished touch to this significant occasion. The celebration marked the achievements of the 64 graduating students and was filled with words of inspiration and encouragement for their future endeavors.

The keynote speaker, Mr. Fritz Gallen, delivered a powerful and motivating address to the graduates. He emphasized the importance of self-belief, adaptability, and resilience in the face of change and failure. Mr. Gallen reminded the students that their minds are their most valuable resource and encouraged them to utilize their intellectual abilities to overcome challenges. He also urged the graduates to strive not only for personal success but to make meaningful contributions to their communities and

society at large.

Governor Joseph, in his special remarks, reinforced Mr. Gallen's messages of self-confidence and determination. He congratulated the graduates on their accomplishments and encouraged them to embrace the future with optimism and courage. Governor Joseph highlighted the importance of believing in oneself and the potential each student has to create positive change. His words served as a testament to the state's commitment to supporting and empowering its young citizens.

The Madolenihmw High School graduation ceremony was a memorable event, celebrating the hard work and dedication of the students. It was an inspiring occasion that not only recognized academic achievement but also emphasized the broader values of perseverance, community service, and lifelong learning. The presence of prominent leaders like Wasahi Madolenihmw, Governor Joseph, Senator Abraham, Senator Neth, Senator Carl, Senator Simina, Senator Lickaneth, Meninkeder Lapalap, Keriau en Meninkeder Lapalap, Speaker and Members of the Madolenihmw Menintiensapw, State Education Officials and members of the Private Sector like Bank of FSM underscored the importance of education in Pohnpei State and the bright future that lies ahead for its youth.



The FSM Health Department, in collaboration with UNICEF preps for implementation of the Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan

UNICEF

May 20, 2024

Pohnpei—To address public nutrition challenges, including childhood obesity, stunting, and micronutrient deficiencies, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), with support from UNICEF and other partners, developed a Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan (M-NAP), which was during the April 2024 National Health Summit.

In readiness for the operationalization of M-NAP, the FSM Department of Health and Social Affairs (DoHSA), with support from UNICEF, organized a 2-day workshop in Pohnpei. The workshop participants included Nutrition and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) focal points from all four (4) FSM state Public Health departments as well as representatives from the Department of Education and Department of Resources and Development (Agriculture, Tax, Trade, Commerce). Also present were

development partners like the World Health Organization (WHO).

The workshop was facilitated by the UNICEF team in collaboration with focal points from DoHSA. Throughout the workshop, participants thoroughly reviewed, revised, and reprioritized M-NAP strategies and activities. They also carefully examined the coordination and governance structures that will oversee the implementation of M-NAP.

In his opening remarks, the Assistant Secretary of Health, Mr. Moses Pretrick, emphasized the crucial role of the workshop in bringing together various partners to discuss the implementation of M-NAP. He highlighted the need to ensure robust advocacy for policy development, strategic planning, and increased resource allocation for nutrition initiatives.

“It is important that we regulate importation and advertisement of



unhealthy foods whilst implementing high-impact nutrition interventions across various sectors, including health, education, and agriculture. This is the way to build a healthy nation,” noted, Mr. Pretrick.

At the end of the workshop, participants presented the expected outputs, including reprioritized strategies and activities, a revised implementation timeline, and designated lead bodies for each activity. UNICEF will further

assist in streamlining and finalizing these outputs and will facilitate follow-up workshops to initiate the implementation of key priorities.

The FSM Department of Health is grateful to UNICEF for the continued support and also the active engagement of participants in the planning the anticipated operationalization of the FSM multisectoral nutrition action plan.

Pacific Islands kava producing countries agree on the plan for regional and united kava approach

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

June 7, 2024

Vanuatu—The Pacific is one step closer to protecting the cultural heritage, quality, intellectual property, and economic benefits of Pacific Kava. Pacific Kava producing countries have agreed on the Implementation Plan for the Regional Kava Development Strategy, part of a collective approach to kava protection and working as one Blue Pacific to address economic issues.

“I need not emphasise the role kava plays in the Pacific region simply because all of us in here are well aware of the importance of KAVA - not only to our cultural heritage, but, also to our economies and the livelihood of our Pacific people.” said Minister for Trade and Commerce, Honourable Bob Loughman in his opening remarks as the Chief Guest on Wednesday.

“For Vanuatu alone, Kava exports increased by 366% from 2014 to 2022,

reaching VUV 3,390m, nearly reaching VUV 4,000m for 2023. This is an indication that more can be done as a region in the kava sector”.

Kava Working Group member, Mr Kelo Yomapisi of the Papua New Guinea National Trade Office, explained that “Enhancing visibility and prominence through [protection of] intellectual property of Pacific Islands Kava gives market access advantage. Our Pacific islands kava has a story attached to it, a story of cultural significance, a heritage passed down by generations”.

Mr Afoa Stefan Szegeedi, Vice-President of the Samoa Association of Manufacturers and Exporters was hopeful that “This plan will give these countries confidence when they import Kava. It will also ensure that the imported Kava has high quality and standards. This will also ensure easier market access for companies”.

Senior government officials and kava

private sector stakeholders from the Kava producing countries met over the last two days to validate the Implementation Plan of the Regional KAVA Development Strategy, following two months of consultation with senior officials, regional agencies and development agencies through the Forum and the Pacific Community.

“The validation will provide Solomon Islands' farmers with a clearer pathway and greater confidence in the kava sector, encouraging them to continue cultivating kava as a valuable economic resource.” was the sentiment from the Chair of the Solomon Islands KAVA technical working group, Mr Wale Tobata.

Also validated at the sessions was the SPIRIT Scoping Study on the Development of a Pharmaceutical/Nutraceutical Industry in the Pacific. “The Kava producing countries have requested for a informative workshop on kava-based nutraceutical and

pharmaceutical derivatives to be convened as soon as practicable, possibly in the margins of the Forum Trade Officials meeting in November” confirmed Ms Setaita Tupua, Team Leader of the SPIRIT Project, as the key recommendations dovetail neatly with the key pillars of the validated Regional Kava Strategy Implementation Plan”.

The Implementation Plan of the RKDS is led by PIF and the Pacific Community, in collaboration with the SPIRIT (Strengthening Pacific Intra-Regional and International Trade) project implemented by PIF and funded by the European Union.

The workshop was held in partnership with the ACP Business-Friendly programme, which is funded by the European Union and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and jointly implemented by ITC's Alliances for Action, the World Bank and UNIDO. This is implemented in the Pacific by the Pacific Community.

Royal Australian Navy Security Advisers participate in Operation Irensia

Australian Embassy to the FSM

June 6, 2024

Guam—Royal Australian Navy Maritime Security Advisers are participating in the inaugural Operation Irensia alongside our #Pacific partners, the United States, the FSM, Palau, and Marshall Islands. Irensia is a local Chamorro word for ‘inheritance’ that speaks to our collective responsibility and sensible stewardship of our beautiful blue continent for generations to come.



Maritime Security Program, to conduct a series of training exchanges and exercises together in Guam.

Operation Irensia brings together the U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia – Sector Guam and FM PW MH patrol boats, delivered by Australia under the Pacific

Pohnpei State Governor the Hon. Stevenson Joseph and FSM Secretary of Foreign Affairs the Hon. Lorin S. Robert



visited the team on board FSS Bethwel Henry while in Guam.

Royal Australian Navy Maritime Security Advisers are proud to be part of this activity alongside our Pacific partners under the Pacific Maritime Security Program.

Thank you to our friends in USCG for establishing this activity. #YourADF

Australia helps to support Pacific transnational crime efforts

Australian Embassy to the FSM

June 14, 2024

FSM--Australian Federal Police Agent Jason Ford was honoured to hand over a TruNarc drug detection device to the FSM National Police last week.

The device will enhance the narcotics detection capacity of the National Police to detect illegal narcotics in the community or at the border.

Australia is pleased to be partnering with FSM to strengthen the Pacific responses to transnational crime and to support law enforcement in the FSM.



Blue Pacific unity the focus as SG Waqa leads first mission to Solomon Islands

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

June 10, 2024

Honiara, Solomon Islands—Today in Honiara, Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Baron Waqa met with the Honourable Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Jeremiah Manele.

The opportunities and challenges faced by the Solomon Islands was a focus of discussion, as Prime Minister Manele’s new Government prepares for the launch of their 100 Days Programme. The importance of solidarity within the Blue Pacific Continent was also considered, as well as the work that the Secretariat is

doing to deliver the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

Secretary General Waqa said “on my first official visit as Secretary General I am honoured to be here in the Solomon Islands. I congratulate Prime Minister Manele on his election and know he will be a dedicated leader for his country and a regional champion.

One of my key priorities as Secretary General is to continue to strengthen our solidarity as a Pacific family. We look forward to working with Prime Minister Manele to build our one Blue Pacific Continent and improve the lives of all Pacific people.”

Secretary General Waqa also met with Hon Peter Agovaka, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade and affirmed the ongoing support of the Forum Secretariat.

The Solomon Islands is due to assume the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2025, and will host the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting next year.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat team is in Honiara for consultations with Government and stakeholders on key policies and initiatives, and to hear how PIFS can strengthen

engagement to ensure the Solomon Islands benefits from the Secretariats work.

This covers the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and priorities of the Solomon Islands such as inclusive economic growth, sustainable development, alleviating poverty and ensuring environmental management.

The Solomon Islands is the 11th country in a programme of national missions to foster stronger ties, and understanding of regional unity and how the Pacific Islands Forum delivers on its mandate.

The Wave Maker: Petty Officer 2nd Class William Naden's journey from Malessso to marine conservation

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

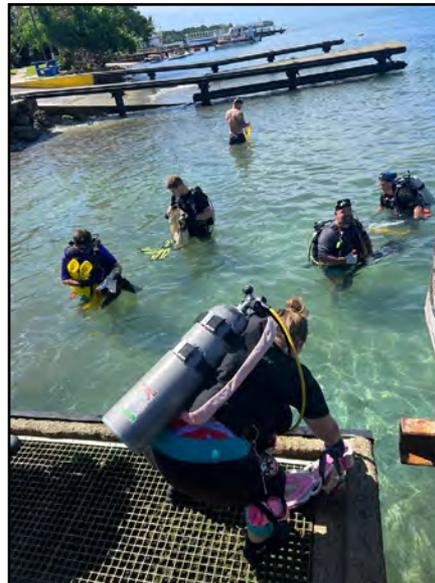
June 1, 2024

Guam—In light of World Coral Reef Awareness Day, we're celebrating one of our own who's making a difference for the reefs locally. Beneath the vast expanse of Guam's azure skies, where the endless ocean meets vibrant coral sands, Petty Officer 2nd Class William Naden is making significant strides in marine conservation.

A native of Malessso and a dedicated boatswain's mate at U.S. Coast Guard Station Apra Harbor, Naden has emerged as a pivotal figure in community leadership and environmental stewardship.

From his humble beginnings along the picturesque shores of southern Guam, Petty Officer Naden's life has been deeply intertwined with the rhythms of the sea. This profound connection to Guam's waters has not only shaped his career path but also ignited a lifelong commitment to environmental protection, a commitment he pursued in college at the University of Guam. As an enthusiastic waterman, his passion for the ocean is a testament to his efforts to preserve its beauty and vitality.

In 2017, driven by a desire to improve the health of his local marine environment, Naden spearheaded the Merizo Pier Cleanup. What began as a small-scale endeavor to clear debris from a specific area of the pier has evolved into a comprehensive initiative covering the wider marine and coastal areas. Year after year, Naden leads a dedicated team of volunteers—divers, snorkelers, and land-based supporters—



to remove harmful debris from these waters.

Together, they have successfully eliminated over 7,000 pounds of trash, including abandoned fishing gear, car parts, and even sunken boats. This is a powerful testament to the impact of collective action in environmental conservation, inspiring us all to contribute to the cause.

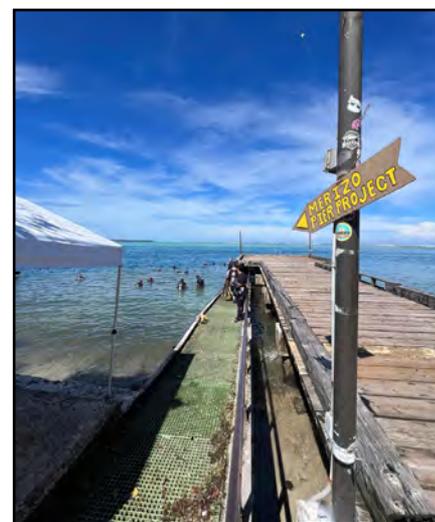
Reflecting on his roles as a Coast Guard member and an environmental advocate, Naden said, "Serving as a boatswain's mate allows me to protect our waters through my profession, but cleaning our shores and educating others about conservation is how I serve my community. It's about preserving our natural heritage and the scenic beauty that defines Guam for current and future generations."

The Micronesian Conservation Coalition (MCC) recently recognized Petty Officer Naden's relentless commitment with the prestigious Tide Changer Award at the 3rd Annual Ocean Gala, held on May 11, 2024. This recognition is a testament to the community's appreciation for his efforts toward sustainable marine practices.

"Petty Officer Naden exemplifies the spirit of the U.S. Coast Guard through his outstanding skills as a coxswain and his deep commitment to the marine environment. His leadership in training our crew in advanced boat handling and integrating his extensive local knowledge boosts our operational efficiency and strengthens our ties with the community we are privileged to serve," said Capt. Nick Simmons, commander of U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam.

The Ocean Gala is a vital platform for acknowledging individuals like Naden, whose endeavors significantly impact the community. This year's gala focused on regional projects like the Yap and Guam Manta projects, emphasizing MCC's broad commitment to marine conservation.

Petty Officer 2nd Class William Naden is a testament to the power of local initiative and global responsibility. Proudly representing the U.S. Coast Guard and his community's environmental goals, Naden continues to inspire us all to participate in preserving the most critical resource of our planet—the ocean. His story is not merely about personal achievement but a collective call to action, reminding us of the role each of us plays in maintaining the health and beauty of our Blue Continent for generations to come.



U.S. Coast Guard hosts cadets from Japanese Coast Guard Training Ship Kojima

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

June 14, 2024

SANTA RITA, Guam—The U.S. Coast Guard hosted Capt. Kazushi Sakae and over 40 cadets from the Japanese Coast Guard training ship, Kojima, during their visit to Guam on June 12, 2024.

The event marked a significant moment of international cooperation and camaraderie between the two maritime services.

The Kojima's visit included a reception aboard the ship later that evening, attended by local leaders and partners, who reciprocated the warm hospitality extended by the Japanese Coast Guard. This visit is particularly notable as it marks the Kojima's first and last port call on Guam before the ship is replaced later this year.

During the visit, three U.S. Coast Guard Academy cadets had the unique opportunity to share their recent experience of joining Japanese counterparts on the voyage to Guam. This journey created lasting memories and built strong professional relationships.

"This visit underscores the enduring relationship between our two services," said Capt. Robert Kistner, commander of U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam. "Our partnership is vital for promoting maritime safety and security and fostering mutual understanding. The cooperation and shared experiences between our cadets and the Japanese Coast Guard cadets are invaluable."

Although a memorandum of cooperation between the sea services has existed since 2010, an agreement signed in 2022 for expanded cooperation highlights the shared dedication to a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific. The new operation, SAPPHIRE (Solid Alliance for Peace and Prosperity with Humanity and Integrity on the Rule of law-based Engagement), encompasses all annual interactions between the Japanese and U.S. Coast Guards, with the goal of increasing interactions over time.

Capt. Kistner also shared a personal reflection, "I had the honor of visiting the Kojima while I was assigned to the East Coast. It's incredible to see the continued collaboration and the strengthening of our partnership over the years."

Following the Kojima visit, the three U.S. Coast Guard cadets are spending the next few weeks with two of the Service's Guam-based Fast Response Cutters. This opportunity will further their field maritime experiences and training, preparing them for future challenges and responsibilities in their careers and the maritime industry.



Opinion Editorial

Making Peace with Land and Ocean: Generation Restoration in action across our Blue Pacific

5 June 2024

By *Munkhtuya Altangerel*
Resident Representative with the
UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji

The very foundation of life for our Pacific people—their ability to sustain themselves—is eroding with each passing season. Climate-induced disasters have caused thousands to suffer, not only from livelihood loss and consequent poverty but also from a fear of losing their spatial identity. The current generation in the Pacific notes that their families are constantly adjusting to the unpredictable forces of nature more than ever before.

Brutal storms that were once a once-in-a-decade phenomenon have become yearly events. The ocean, once a source of bounty, now unleashes its force upon our small island nations with increasing regularity. Ocean acidification has stressed our Blue Pacific, with pH levels decreasing by 30 percent since the early 19th Century. The coral reefs, vital to marine life and the livelihoods of many Pacific communities, are bleaching and dying at an alarming rate.

The resilience and adaptability of Pacific people are unmatched. Despite facing these relentless challenges, they continue to persevere and adapt to their changing environment. However, disbelief prevails as they confront this new reality.

"This is not how things used to be. In our memory, there have never been longer droughts, powerful cyclones, or flash floods like what we're experiencing now," said a resident of Kiribati, a country on the frontline of our changing environment.

Together, we can tackle today's environmental challenges and move forward socially, economically, and politically, focusing on what can be achieved collectively. Around 40 percent of Earth's land is already degraded, affecting a staggering 3.2 billion people worldwide due to desertification. This situation is expected to worsen, with projections indicating that over three-quarters of the global population will be impacted by drought by 2050. In the Federated States of Micronesia, 2024 has seen unprecedented drought conditions, affecting an estimated 16,000 people across the North Pacific nation.

As a result of human actions, environmental damage is intensifying, leading to severe consequences like climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. Our generation has a critical responsibility to safeguard the environment and restore our planet's ecosystems to their natural state. The urgency is particularly pronounced in the Pacific, where rising sea levels threaten to submerge entire islands, displacing communities and erasing cultures.

The dedication of Pacific people in confronting climate change is unparalleled. Across the region we see initiatives focused on both immediate relief and long-term solutions. Projects aimed at strengthening coastal defenses, restoring mangroves, and implementing sustainable agricultural practices are already making a difference.

There is one thing that unites many of these initiatives: to protect our Blue Pacific, we must improve our region's environmental security. This involves not only physical measures but also advocating for policy changes and securing international support.

To achieve an environmentally secure Pacific, we need to scale up evidence-based approaches. Scientific research and traditional knowledge must go hand in hand to create effective strategies for adaptation and mitigation. Together with our partners, we must advocate for regional environmental and climate security and justice in international forums. For situations where adaptation is limited, we must equip Pacific Island Countries with the tools required to manage trade-offs,

resource loss, and redistribution.

Community involvement is key. Engaging local populations in decision-making processes ensures that solutions are culturally appropriate and widely accepted. Education and awareness programs are crucial in empowering communities to take proactive measures in preserving their environment. By fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility, we can build a collective resilience that is both strong and sustainable.

We cannot turn back time, but we can grow forests, revive water sources, and restore soils. Initiatives such as reforestation and sustainable land management are essential in reversing some of the damage done. Prime Minister of Fiji, Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka, has declared the Pacific a "zone of peace". We must extend this premise to our environment, making peace with the land, and our Blue Pacific Ocean. If we fail to draw up an equivalent social contract between humans and our flora and fauna, the Sixth Extinction and the destruction of between 20-50 percent of all living species on Earth awaits within this Century.

On the back of World Environment Day, we must remind ourselves that the time for a resolute, comprehensive, and coordinated response to environmental degradation and climate change in the Pacific is now. Our future may seem bleak, but not all is lost. With concerted efforts and unwavering commitment, we can create a sustainable and resilient future for our children and grandchildren.

It is our young Pacific people – Generation Restoration – who are leading the charge. We must stand behind them, and champion their efforts, for they are our true climate leaders. From grassroots initiatives to high-level policy advocacy, our children and young people are taking their commitment for the Blue Pacific Continent to the world stage. But they cannot do it alone.

Together, we can transform challenges into opportunities and build a thriving, resilient Pacific. The road ahead is long and fraught with difficulties, but with unity and determination, we can navigate this turbulent landscape and emerge stronger than ever.

Pacific research focuses on finding the right balance



The University of Auckland

June 14, 2024

Samoa—Asetoa Sam Pilisi's research focuses on the cost of Pacific people serving their community.

The Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland doctoral candidate is exploring Pacific self-care and burnout. More than 1100 participated in a survey posing the culturally controversial question – "Is it selfish to look after yourself?"

Pilisi (Alofi North and Avatele of Niue, Sato'alepai and Vailoa Palauli of Sāmoa) says his research is aimed at collecting the experiences of Pacific people born in Aotearoa.

He said the act of 'service' for Pacific people tended to net cultural credits but is sometimes at the expense of other areas of their life, including personal, physical and mental wellbeing.

"You have to ask the question about how much is too much? What is the actual cost of serving others because that's culturally expected, even at your own expense."

There was power and strength in the collective of Pacific communities, often coming together to increase resourcing, finding workarounds when there were shortfalls. However rising to the occasion whenever there was a need from within the family, the community, and church, came at a cost.

See continuation on next page

Pacific Islands Development Program and University of the South Pacific Sign Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen collaboration

Bolstering regional collaboration to advance Pacific development

East West Center

June 13, 2024

HONOLULU—The Pacific Islands Development Program at the East-West Center and the University of the South Pacific have signed a memorandum of understanding to solidify their shared commitments to leveraging resources and expertise in service to their Pacific Islands stakeholders. The agreement strengthens collaboration between the two member agencies of the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific, or CROP.

East-West Center (EWC) President Suzanne Puanani Vares-Lum and the Pacific Islands Development Program, or PIDP, were honored to welcome University of the South Pacific (USP) Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Pal Ahluwalia, Chief Operating Officer Mr. Walter Fraser, and Development Cooperation Coordinator Mr. Aneet Kumar to EWC for the signing of the memorandum.

As two of nine CROP agencies mandated by Pacific Islands Leaders to strengthen Pacific regionalism, provide high-level policy advice, and collectively respond to priorities identified by Pacific Islands

Forum Leaders, the agreement between USP and PIDP indicates a strong commitment to improving cooperation, coordination, and collaboration between Pacific regional organizations.

Their shared vision for mutual collaboration builds upon the people-to-people and institutional ties that link USP and PIDP. Based in the East-West Center and located on the campus of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, PIDP is strategically positioned to advance education, research, and leadership development in collaboration with USP.

Specific areas of cooperation include joint research activities, participation in seminars and meetings, exchange of academic materials and information, and the development of short-term leadership and other capacity building programs.

“Mutual collaboration in the areas of joint research, academic exchange, and leadership development programs allows both of our institutions to reduce duplication of efforts, and instead, work together to deliver on Leaders’ commitments to regionalism and supporting Pacific Islands countries and territories. I am very excited about the potential impact this can have on



our youth, our professionals, and our capabilities in charting an enduring course through the waters that lie ahead toward a prosperous future for the Pacific region,” said Dr. Mary Therese Perez Hattori, director of PIDP.

By sowing seeds of regional cooperation, CROP agencies such as USP and PIDP help ensure that the Pacific region continues to reap a harvest of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity for all Pacific peoples with

the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent as a guiding star through the next several decades.

“The East-West Center is excited to work with the University of the South Pacific to advance the third pillar of the Center’s strategic plan—partner with the Pacific Islands—in concert with broader CROP efforts to deliver on the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent,” said Suzanne Puanani Vares-Lum, president of the East-West Center.

...Balance

Continued from previous page

“You have to ask the question that if you are fulfilling collective responsibilities, at what point do we stop to consider our own personal wellbeing. How do we search for balance?”

Working with a steering committee from the Pacific community, Pilisi was acutely aware of posing a question that struck at the heart of Pacific cultural practise.

Some felt that he was imposing a western lens on the lived-experiences of the Pacific diaspora.

“We’re asking people to stop and take an inward look at ourselves,” a

practise he acknowledged was outside of Pacific peoples’ norms, because the focus is on the collective rather than the individual.

“Collectively we do some beautiful stuff that supersedes at times what our individual pursuits are unable to do, but it can come at a cost and its often not sustainable.”

Part of the current research looks at understanding the burnout experience. Working with a community steering group has been invaluable gauging differing perspectives.

“Our communities do understand what it means being ‘spent or operating on an empty tank’ but for various reasons, even if on empty, when duty calls, we get up and we keep going. Our behaviour is influenced by getting up and doing awesome things,” creating a sense of pride and mana.

However he acknowledged that for some, rising to the challenge to help others was driven by markers at the other end of the spectrum, such as shame and stigma.

“So we will do something out of fear, out of shame and not being stigmatised, not wanting to be ostracised. Guilt of not fulfilling collective responsibilities or letting others down can also be contributing factors.”

Selfishness was a concept counter to Pacific cultural values and saying ‘no’ was a difficult undertaking.

“What does self-care look like? What does looking after yourself look like?”

Pilisi recently attended the American College of Preventive Medicine 2024 Conference in Washington DC earlier

this year, he says the experience highlighted the unique underlying kaupapa of Māori and Pacific research.

“It was a very different experience for me, it gave me an appreciation for the approaches taken here.”

Pilisi is currently half way through his PhD research and was grateful for the support received from New Zealand’s Pasifika Medical Association (PMA), an organisation that is active in promoting and supporting Pacific health, and have partnered with Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland, to grow Pacific research.

“I’m grateful for the many hands and hearts involved in this research, so that means I have to show the same energy and do all the boring/hard things day in, day out!”

FSM deposits instrument of ratification for BBNJ Agreement

FSM Permanent Mission to the UN

June 3, 2024

New York—In a brief ceremony today, Ambassador Jeem S. Lippwe, the Permanent Representative of FSM to the United Nations in New York, deposited FSM's instrument of ratification for the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction ("BBNJ Agreement"). The instrument was received by the Legal Counsel of the United Nations, Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares.

FSM had actively participated in the negotiations of the BBNJ Agreement, starting in the Preparatory Committee. During the Intergovernmental Conference, FSM coordinated the Pacific Small Island Developing States on Area-Based Management Tools, including Marine Protected Areas, and also served as a member of the bureau of the Conference.

On 20 September 2023, President Simina was the first world leader to sign the treaty. Today's deposit of the instrument of ratification makes FSM the seventh country to do so. Both Ambassador Lippwe and the Legal Counsel expressed their hope that other countries would follow soon. Work now shifts towards implementation. The UN General Assembly has set up a Preparatory Commission to lay the groundwork ahead of entry into force of the treaty. The Preparatory Commission will have its organizational meeting in late June of 2024.



Kosrae State leadership engages in comprehensive dialogue with SPC on strategic initiatives and future collaborations

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

June 1, 2024

Kosrae—During the SPC HRSD PPAC Disability Inclusion Workshop held in Kosrae from May 27-29, 2024, a pivotal meeting took place on Wednesday, May 29, 2024, bringing together the leadership of Kosrae State and Regional Director, Mr. William Kostka, of the Pacific Community (SPC). This significant gathering, held from 10 am to 1 pm, was attended by Governor Palik, Lt. Governor Nena, Speaker Phillip, members of the Kosrae Legislature, department directors, and other key staff.

In the meeting, a comprehensive presentation was delivered, detailing SPC's vision, mission, strategic journey, flagship programs, key focus areas, divisions, and technical areas. Highlighted initiatives included the Unlocking the Blue Pacific Prosperity (UBPP) initiative, the Digital Earth Pacific program, and the SPC FSM GCF Enhance Direct Access project, which emphasizes food and water security and disaster risk reduction. Further discussions covered the Sustainable Energy and Accompanying Measures Project, SPC's involvement in FestPAC, PPAC, gender initiatives, fisheries, and other areas.

The presentation was exceptionally well-received by Kosrae's leadership, who noted it as the first time they had received such an extensive overview of SPC's efforts in Micronesia. The leadership showed particular interest in the Digital Earth Pacific program and agreed to convene a meeting to outline Kosrae's priorities for SPC, which will be communicated through the FSM National Government.

PICRC partners with Whaleology to record whales and dolphins around Palau

Palau International Coral Reef Center

June 5, 2024

Palau—The Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) has just concluded a collaboration with Whaleology, a consultancy organization that specializes in the research and protection of whales in the Pacific. Over three weeks in May, Whaleology worked with the researchers at PICRC to provide training on cetacean research techniques and to carry out surveys in Palau's nearshore and offshore environments to put these methods into practice.

Whales and dolphins are cetaceans, a widely-distributed and diverse group of marine mammals. As large, long-lived, and migratory animals, they are highly sensitive to the changes of their surroundings. By monitoring their populations, behaviors, and movements, scientists can gather crucial data on the areas and habitats where they feed and breed. This information helps identify potential threats and enables environmental managers to take necessary conservation measures to protect not only the whales but the entire marine ecosystem.

Olive Andrews, Director of Whaleology, was invited by the Palau National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS) Office to deliver a program for research capacity building at PICRC. Andrews was joined by Ben Parangi, Whaleology's Director of Education, and Dr. Carlos Olavarria, the Director of CEAZA in Chile and an expert in whale DNA analysis. Their goal was to build capacity with local researchers to further investigate the abundance, diversity, and distribution of whales and dolphins present in the waters of Palau, determine the cultural identity of cetaceans in Palau from acoustic recordings of their dialects, and determine the areas of critical habitat used for feeding and breeding activities to inform cetacean management.

During a two-day workshop, PICRC researchers learned about the different species of whales, how to identify them, and how to use the equipment necessary for the research. With access to specialized technology such as waterproof microphones (hydrophones), scientists



are able to determine the different species of whales and some of their behaviors through the sounds they make. The identification can be complemented by other identifying features such as the shape and positioning of fins on the body.

PICRC researcher, Greta Sartori, highlighted the importance of the training and awareness that the workshop gave her. "After completing this training, I realized that I'd seen and photographed a very rare whale species, the Longman's beaked whale, in the PNMS two years ago. We didn't know that this species existed in Palau and now we have identifiable photographs. And they had a calf with them," she stated. "Before the workshop, there were 15 different species of whales confirmed in Palau's waters, and seven more were likely in the area. During the two weeks of surveys, we were able to confirm two different species out of those seven and identify a new one!"

During the surveys aboard PSS Kadam, which were underpinned by a partnership with the Division of Maritime Security and Fish & Wildlife Protection and the Ministry of Justice, the researchers confirmed the presence of dwarf sperm whales—the only marine mammal that, like squid, uses an ink sac as a defense mechanism. Furthermore, the team identified Sei whales in Palau—the 4th largest cetacean. Ten miles outside of Ulong Channel, the researchers came across a feeding frenzy, which consisted of four Bryde's whales, a school of sharks and many different species of birds feeding on bait fish. PSS Kadam's Executive Officer, Jim Kloulechad, stated that in 20 years on the water, he'd never seen so many animals at the same time, which, to him, suggests that the PNMS is working. The group also observed a small pod of three orcas, or killer whales, which, Andrews later stated, based on their calls and features, could be related to the killer whales found off the coast of Alaska and Canada.

As well as telling us more about Palau's ocean inhabitants, the research could go on to inform future whale watching endeavors in Palau, and best-practices to follow when observing them to protect the safety of these animals.

Following the research and capacity building program, a cetacean management workshop was hosted at MAFE bringing together government and non-government stakeholders to review what is known of cetaceans in Palau and provide recommendations on issues such as cetacean strandings protocols, cetacean tourism best practices, and progressing an internationally Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA) for cetaceans in Palau.

"The project exceeded our expectations in terms of cetacean data collection and the amount of interest from the public," said Andrews. "It has been a privilege to work so closely with our Palauan colleagues. This has been a 360-degree learning process and we were delighted with the feedback. We hope that this exciting work together may inform the management of cetaceans in the PNMS."

Collaborative effort to harness volcanic aquifers for sustainable water solutions in the Pacific

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

June 10, 2024

Suva, Fiji--Recognising the need to tackle critical water management challenges for the region's growing development needs and rising demand, three Pacific Island countries are teaming up to develop an innovative and sustainable solution to ensure access to clean water for their populations.

In the Pacific, groundwater is mostly extracted from shallow coastal aquifers, which are easier to access for those in densely populated coastal areas. However, groundwater, abundant in volcanic aquifers, remains underutilised and poorly understood. Reliance on volcanic aquifers is likely to increase as rainfall and surface water sources become more variable and less predictable with climate change.

A project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), under GEF 7 and implemented in partnership between the Food Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Pacific Community (SPC) is looking at the potential of mostly untapped volcanic aquifers to contribute to the socio-economic development needs of Pacific countries. The enhancing water-food security and climate resilience in volcanic island countries of the Pacific project will be implemented in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

This project aims to demonstrate the potential of developing volcanic aquifers to enhance water and food security, improve climate resilience, sustain ecosystem services, and alleviate pressures on over-exploited coastal aquifers.

This will be accomplished by assessing and expanding the role of volcanic aquifers, implementing effective groundwater governance frameworks, addressing priority issues through demonstration pilots, and strengthening institutional capacity.

An important consideration for this project as stakeholders gather in Suva for the project's inception workshop is how the application of holistic and evidence-based approaches is ensured to safeguard sustainability.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the Permanent Secretary for the Fiji Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Sivendra Michael (PhD), emphasise the evolving challenges of water supply management.

"Our islands have been able to host our societies for centuries due to natural freshwater availability and the natural aquifers that have been important for supporting life on land within the immensity of the Pacific Ocean. Urbanisation, population growth,



deforestation, unsustainable land and water use, and climate change have changed water dynamics on our islands, and any impact on this critical resource is of concern to our societies," said PS Michael.

He added, "Groundwater, although abundant in volcanic islands, is increasingly at risk from contamination and overexploitation. It is my hope that this project, which will support important efforts in Fiji, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands will also help us to share knowledge and best practices between our island nations recognising the similar challenges and threats we face."

The Acting Director General for the Vanuatu Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, Erickson Sammy, highlighted the unique challenges faced by Vanuatu in ensuring water security.

"Despite abundant rainfall, the challenging topography means that perennial streams are rare, with significant watercourses found mainly on the largest islands," said Mr Sammy.

He also emphasised the country's vulnerability to natural disasters, stating, "Vanuatu is notably vulnerable to natural disasters such as droughts, floods, cyclones, earthquakes, and volcanic activity, all of which impact water and food security."

On the topic of tourism and its impact on water resources, Mr Sammy mentioned, "Tourism is a growing sector, supported by the same water resources as the local population. Groundwater plays a crucial role, especially in urban areas, yet comprehensive assessments of these resources remain limited."

Blue Pacific unity the focus as SG Waqa leads first mission to Solomon Islands

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

June 10, 2024

Honiara, Solomon Islands—Today in Honiara, Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Baron Waqa met with the Honourable Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Jeremiah Manele.

The opportunities and challenges faced by the Solomon Islands was a focus of discussion, as Prime Minister Manele's new Government prepares for the launch of their 100 Days Programme. The importance of solidarity within the Blue Pacific Continent was also considered, as well as the work that the Secretariat is

doing to deliver the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

Secretary General Waqa said "on my first official visit as Secretary General I am honoured to be here in the Solomon Islands. I congratulate Prime Minister Manele on his election and know he will be a dedicated leader for his country and a regional champion.

One of my key priorities as Secretary General is to continue to strengthen our solidarity as a Pacific family. We look forward to working with Prime Minister Manele to build our one Blue Pacific Continent and improve the lives of all Pacific people."

Secretary General Waqa also met with Hon Peter Agovaka, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade and affirmed the ongoing support of the Forum Secretariat.

The Solomon Islands is due to assume the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2025, and will host the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting next year.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat team is in Honiara for consultations with Government and stakeholders on key policies and initiatives, and to hear how PIFS can strengthen

engagement to ensure the Solomon Islands benefits from the Secretariats work.

This covers the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and priorities of the Solomon Islands such as inclusive economic growth, sustainable development, alleviating poverty and ensuring environmental management.

The Solomon Islands is the 11th country in a programme of national missions to foster stronger ties, and understanding of regional unity and how the Pacific Islands Forum delivers on its mandate.