JOINT COMMUNIQUE

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

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st Micronesian Chief Executives’ Summit (MCES) was held in Koror, Palau, on February 23-24, 2016.

The MCES reaffirmed the commitment of each of the participants, on behalf of their people and their governments, to establish closer ties, ensure future discussions and agree on initiatives for the benefit of members and the Micronesian Region.

His Excellency Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr. of Palau, as Chairman, expressed his appreciation to the Chief Executives and their jurisdictional representatives for their attendance and active participation in the MCES.

Following the opening ceremonies of the MCES, which included statements by each of the Chief Executives, reports and recommendations from regional committees were given, along with presentations on a number of issues of interest in the region and jointly directed action in their respective jurisdictions, as reflected in this 21st MCES Communiqué.

II. REGIONAL COMMITTEES

1. Micronesia Challenge

The Micronesia Challenge (MC) Steering Committee presented its progress report since the 20th MCES, celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the MC and the accomplishments made over the past decade. The Committee reported that it is more than half way to meeting established conservation targets, has continued its partnership with the Regional Invasive Species Council (RISC) and developed invasive species criteria for MC sites. The Committee reminded the Chief Executives that there are only four more years to go in the MC.
The Committee reported on continued efforts being made to implement the MC Sustainable Finance Plan, including leveraged non-endowment funds, and announced the new Bill Raynor MC Scholarship Fund. The status of the MC Endowment was shown to be nearly $17 million in total, with sub-accounts from the FSM, the RMI, and Palau, with Guam and CNMI in progress.

The MC emphasized the need for the Chief Executives to implement local income generating mechanisms to reach sustainable finance goals, and to raise the remaining balance of the endowment of approximately $39 million, which may increase with new commitments over time.

The Chief Executives congratulated the Micronesia Challenge on its 10th Anniversary, recognized that the MC is designed to be an Enabling Mechanism and supported the MC’s efforts to:

- Continue to raise MC support in jurisdictional, regional and international events;
- Develop policies to effectively integrate natural resource management strategies and effective management criteria in relation to MC measures;
- Move into Phase Two of the MC Endowment while urging each jurisdiction to aggressively establish financing mechanisms to cover their respective financing gaps; and
- Collectively agree to direct funding streams from appropriate sources into the MC Endowment.

The Chief Executives also directed relevant authorities to take all necessary actions to initiate and conclude debt swaps to support marine conservation and eco-system based adaptation to Climate Change and to finance Phase Two of the MC Endowment.

2. **Regional Invasive Species Council**

The Regional Invasive Species Council (RISC) reported on the activities of each of its jurisdictions to prevent, control, and eradicate invasive species. The RISC reported on the continuing need for a regional coordination mechanism and funding to effectively implement the Regional Biosecurity Plan’s (RBP’s) Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP). The President of Palau reported that the Republic of Palau just passed a biosecurity law that he intended to sign in the coming week and encouraged other jurisdictions to do the same to help close our regional borders to invasive species of all kinds.

Recognizing the growing dangers of Invasive Species and the opportunities that exist from the completion of the Regional Biosecurity Plan (RBP), the Chief Executives:

- Directed the MC focal points in each jurisdiction to work together to identify appropriate funding for a Regional Micronesia Biosecurity Coordinator position within the next six months.
Signed a letter to the Department of Defense and other appropriate agencies of the United States (U.S.) Government requesting that they identify funding over the next five years, and beyond, to implement the RBP, in line with the recommendations, as funded by the Department of Defense.

3. Regional Health Committee

The Regional Health Committee, supported by its Secretariat, the Pacific Island Health Officers’ Association (PIHOA), reported that U.S. Pacific Island Jurisdictions continue to face significant challenges across a number of health system components, posing critical and continuing barriers to effectively and efficiently responding to acute diseases burdens. Micronesia continues to experience double burdens of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and in recent years, multiple outbreaks of vector-born infections, such as dengue, chikungunya, and now Zika. Overall, the health systems of the U.S. Pacific Island jurisdictions are highly fragile, and therefore vulnerable to external market and political forces.

The Committee indicated that now, more than ever, the Micronesian states and nations need to prepare for and commit to critically investing, for the long term, in strengthening their health systems to build resiliency, and therefore sustainability of their health systems, while also improving services to affect improvements in health outcomes. All the Micronesian nations and states face critical shortages of local, qualified healthcare workers. There continues to be a heavy reliance on expatriate workers to fill critical shortages, especially in specialist health fields, and pay scales are not sufficiently competitive enough to both recruit and retain qualified individuals.

The Committee stressed that certain critical steps must be taken to realize significant inroads into building resiliency and enabling improved health responses. Among these is the commitment and investment in funding for local and regional health workforce development efforts, including building regional and local epidemiology capacities. In addition, the most critical challenge for effective workforce development in health and other development sectors is the poor K-12 (kindergarten through 12th grade) education attainment in math, science, English, and technology.

The Chief Executives recognized the critical state of health care in Micronesia and supported the above recommendations of the Health Committee. Specifically, the Chief Executives directed the relevant officials in each jurisdiction to work together to consider the establishment of a Regional Education Committee and report on this effort prior to the next MCES.

Finally, the Chief Executives signed Resolution 21-01, calling for investments in human resources for health/workforce development, and Resolution 21-02, calling for investments in strengthening health surveillance and epidemiology capacity and systems.
4. Pacific Workforce Investment Workgroup
Regional Workforce Development Council

The Regional Workforce Development Council (RWDC) presented its strategy to the Chief Executives to improve workforce participation to reduce the region’s use of imported foreign labor and to assess and address the skill levels and productivity of Micronesia’s workforce. The planning efforts of the RWDC/Pacific Workforce Investment Group (PWIW) continue to source innovative workforce strategies and support increased opportunities to align practical program strategies that represent regional workforce interests. The strategy facilitates sharing information about jobs and skilled/qualified Micronesians to fill those jobs throughout Micronesia and the U.S.

During Committee presentations, it was clear to the Chief Executives that workforce development is a critical issue in both the public and private sectors and has relevance to almost every committee and issue presented at the MCES. The Chief Executives therefore recognized the need to align the workforce interest to the MCES issue areas.

The Chief Executives therefore supported and affirmed:

- The incorporation of the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act (WIOA) into national workforce development frameworks as guideposts for the region’s workforce development efforts;
- The continued endorsement of the One-Stop Center approach to workforce development through the creation of One-Stop Centers in each jurisdiction to assess, train and place Micronesian workers in private sector jobs; and
- A specific workforce development response, across all sectors, to environmental issues, such as climate change, taking into account the need for adaptation measures.

5. Regional Tourism Committee

The Regional Tourism Committee reported on the national and regional efforts to enhance marketing products and programs for tourism. The Committee reported that the regional push to expand the Cruise Industry is well underway, with a taskforce in place along with consultants who have been engaged to assist in the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Official Report in May of this year. The Committee stressed the need for workforce development in all areas of tourism management and support. The Committee also stressed the need to take into account environmental impacts in all tourism planning, especially in regard to ‘mass tourism’.

The Chief Executives recognized that tourism is the primary engine of growth in the region and must be supported in a sustainable manner. The Chief Executives supported the Committee’s recommendations to:
➢ Develop a taskforce team for holistic regional aviation strategies with consultants;
➢ Continue its on-going efforts regarding the Cruise Ship Industry;
➢ Develop regional tourism policy and work-force-ready strategies for:

✓ A labor policy framework development;
✓ A labor pool database;
✓ Employment standards; and
✓ Traditional knowledge and its transfer to future generations; and

➢ Develop sustainable tourism strategies and plans, to include standard rules for standard environmental impact assessment, linked to climate change impacts.

6. Regional Energy Committee

The Energy Committee provided a status update to the Chief Executives and no recommendations were made.

7. Regional Telecommunications Committee

The Telecommunications Committee did not report this year to the Chief Executives.

8. Regional Transportation Committee

The Commonwealth Ports Authority provided a presentation on behalf the CNMI regarding the Pacific Regional ARFF Training Center (PRATC). The PRATC provides training to firefighters in order to meet the airport requirements of the Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and ultimately to maintain operations and avoid airport closure due to non-compliance. The PRATC has numerous graduates from throughout Micronesia since 2005.

The Chief Executives applauded the efforts of the PRATC over the past decade and agreed to sign a resolution supporting the PRATC and recommending participation in the firefighter Training Program.

9. Pacific Islands Regional Recycling Initiative Council

The Pacific Islands Regional Recycling Initiative Council (PIRRIC) did not provide a presentation at this MCES. However, the PIRRIC did show a video on the Palau Solid Waste Management activities and organized a site visit of the Koror State Solid Waste Facility.

The Chief Executives reviewed the PIRRIC Report and recommended that:
• The Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) be based in Guam;
• Appropriate authorities in each jurisdiction, working with the Micronesian Center for a Sustainable Future (MCSF), identify funding, in the next twelve months, to support a PIRRIC sub-regional coordinator to be placed at SWANA office;
• Appropriate authorities, with the assistance of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the MCSF, along with a Regional Coordinator, when funded, coordinate and update respective national solid waste management plans for national endorsement in time for a donor roundtable side event at the 23rd MCES; and
• Appropriate authorities in each jurisdiction, work with the MCSF to identify funding necessary to attend future MCES sessions in order to sustain and advance the solid waste management efforts in our region.

III. OTHER MATTERS

1. Climate Change

The Chief Executives were briefed on the Paris Climate Change Agreement and the need to ratify the Agreement. The Chief Executives were also advised of the enhanced and expanded funding opportunities that are now available to jurisdictions to combat the impacts of climate change.

The Chief Executives expressed their support for the immediate ratification by all countries of the Paris Agreement. The Presidents acknowledged the seriousness of the challenges posed by Climate Change, particularly in this El Niño year, which has already caused the FSM, the RMI and the State of Peleliu in Palau to declare states of emergency.

During the final day of the MCES, the President of Palau announced that the Olbiil Era Kelulau, the National Congress of Palau, had ratified the Agreement.

2. WICHE

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) made a presentation to the Chief Executives as a follow-up to the presentation that they made at the 19th MCES in Saipan. WICHE is a 16-member state/territory organization whose members work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for member citizens. The Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas is currently the only MCES member of WICHE and pays all of the dues for the Pacific region. Other jurisdictions have the opportunity to join WICHE and the current costs would be prorated between members.

3. Micronesia Center for a Sustainable Future (MCSF)

The Chief Executives led the discussion of the Micronesia Center for a Sustainable Future. Preliminary to this discussion, they discussed the issue of the structure of the MCES and the need to institutionalize the MCES beyond a ‘summit’ basis to strengthen
the voice of Micronesia and to improve its response to regional issues on an on-going basis. In line with this focus, the Chief Executives agreed to rename the MCES as the Micronesian Islands’ Forum (MIF). They agreed that the MIF will include the functions and activities of the current Micronesian Chief Executives’ Summit and the Micronesian Presidents’ Summit and that the MCSF will serve as the Secretariat for both. They also indicated that they may consider changing the name of the MCSF at a later date to reflect its functions under this new umbrella organization.

In regard to the MCSF, the Presidents expressed their gratitude to the Republic of China for its generous grant to the MCSF. The Presidents agreed that other funding was needed to establish an effective secretariat function for the MIF.

The Chief Executives also agreed in principle to an annual contribution of $10,000 by each of the current MCES jurisdictions to the MCSF for two years to help support the Center. The first contribution will be due by October, 2016. Contributions will increase to $15,000 in year three. The Chief Executives leaders further agreed to use these funding sources to leverage other funding opportunities with their regional and international partners.

The Chief Executives directed that prior corporate dues for the MCSF Corporation in Guam be paid.

Finally, the Chief Executives endorsed Palau as the appropriate location for the MCSF Office to serve as the Secretariat for the newly named MIF.

4. Regional Events

The Presidents recognized and expressed their support for a number of regional events scheduled to take place in the coming year, including the Festival of Pacific Arts in Guam, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), the Pacific Media Summit in Palau, the Micronesian Games in Yap, and the 47th Pacific Islands Leaders’ Forum in Pohnpei. The Presidents agreed to provide all available support for these events. The Presidents also called upon the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and all other regional partners to provide increased technical and financial support for these important regional events.

5. Tony durum

The Chief Executives signed a resolution expressing their strong support of the International Peace Bureau’s nomination of RMI’s former Foreign Minister Tony A. deBrum for the Nobel Peace Prize.

6. Imperial Pacific International CNMI LLC

The Imperial Pacific International CNMI LLC (IPI) notified the Chief Executives that their new hotel and gambling enterprises in Saipan will open up to 20,000 jobs for the region in the hospitality industry in the near future.
IV. CLOSING

1. Venue.

The Chief Executives announced that the 21st Micronesia Chief Executives’ Summit will be held in Guam in February of 2017.

2. Closing Remarks.

The Chief Executives all expressed their gratitude to Palau for hosting the 21st MCES and reaffirmed their commitment to their continuing partnership in the region.
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President
Republic of Palau

PETER M. CHRISTIAN
President
Federated States of Micronesia

HILDA C. HEINE, Ed. D
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