



## JOINT COMMUNIQUE

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

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Leaders of the U.S. Territory of Guam, the Governments of the Federated States of Micronesia and the State Governments of Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap, along with the CNMI, Guam, Palau, Nauru and the RMI held their 26<sup>th</sup> Micronesian Islands Forum Annual Meeting in Guam on June 3-5, 2024.

The Forum reaffirmed the commitment of each of the participants, on behalf of their people and their governments, to establish closer ties, strengthen cooperation, and agree on initiatives for the benefit of members and the entire Micronesian Region.

The Governor of Guam and Chair of the MIF, the Honorable Lou Leon Guerrero, expressed her appreciation to the Leaders and their jurisdictional representatives for their attendance and active participation in the 26<sup>th</sup> Micronesian Islands Forum. The Leaders expressed their collective appreciation to Governor Leon Guerrero and the People of Guam for their warm hospitality.

Following the opening ceremonies of the Forum, which included statements by each of the Leaders, reports and recommendations from regional committees were given, along with presentations on a number of issues of interest in the region and the Leaders jointly directed action in their respective jurisdictions, as reflected in this 26<sup>th</sup> MIF Communiqué.

### II. REGIONAL COMMITTEES

#### 1. Regional Workforce Development Council

The Committee reported on activities on each of the islands and discussed their unique emerging issues. The Committee also focused on the emerging workforce development issues in the Micronesian region, including:

- The skills gap between job applicants and job availability due to emerging industries that are geared toward more professional skills rather than vocational.
- An aging workforce that creates a discrepancy between current industry demands over a new and future workforce that has a different set of demands for work.



- The lack of current in-demand industries in the primary education curriculum which creates a skills-deficient workforce in the future.
- The Committee indicated that their overriding goals were:
- To entice governments, private sectors, and non-profit organizations to work together to identify emerging industries and to develop training programs geared towards them; and
- To develop a government-level incentivized workforce development program to entice businesses and employees to participate in the process of upskilling and retaining their local workforce.
- The Leaders recognized the uniquely difficult issues relating to workforce development in the region and each of our islands and endorsed the recommendations of the Committee, as follows:
- Develop a comprehensive regional migration policy setting forth roles and responsibilities in order to prepare potential migrants for a smooth transition;
- Conduct quarterly workforce development group meetings to provide updates on achieving our common goals for the next MIF; and
- Seek U. S. Congressional action to include all non-WIOA funded nations to be able to participate in grant and funding opportunities within WIOA programs.

## **2. Regional Education Committee (REC)**

The Leaders reviewed the endorsed recommendations from the 25<sup>th</sup> MIF and discussed the emerging educational issues in the region, including:

- The shortage of skilled workers, including teachers and health practitioners;
- Out migration;
- Competition with online learning; and
- Data sharing and research agreements.

The Leaders recognized the many challenges facing the islands in improving educational opportunities for our citizens and endorsed the recommendations of the Committee as follows:

- Support the organization of and funding for a Micronesian Regional Education Summit in the fall of 2024;
- Work to provide “free college” initiatives and options for students in need;
- Explore the establishment of a Virtual College/University for the Pacific Region;
- Expand a data sharing and research collaborative protocol (i.e. research clearinghouse);
- Establish a convening date on Guam in October 2024 to discuss the development of the Summit; and
- Seek funding (grants/sponsorships) to support the Education Committee.

## **3. Regional Health Committee (RHC)**

The Regional Health Committee stressed the need, the value, and the potential to advance health care through the use of technology, the advancement of telehealth, telemedicine, virtual care, and



digital healthcare. The Committee reviewed the activities and advancements of each jurisdiction over the past year and recalled past Resolutions from the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> MIFS that are still relevant regarding:

- Veterans Services through U.S. Veterans Affairs (MF Resolution 24-02);
- Antimicrobial Resistance (MIF Resolution 24-03);
- Innovative Technology (MIF Resolution 25-01);
- Health Workforce Development (MF Resolution 25-02); and
- Outer Island Transportation, Communication and Health Dispensary Infrastructure (MIF Resolution 25-03).

The Committee stressed that it is of critical importance to formally establish government-wide policies and practices for integrated, multi-sectoral health plans that incorporate interventions across key sectors to promote and safeguard individual and societal health.

Leaders recognized the critical investment needs in the area of health in each jurisdiction and in the region and endorsed MIF Resolution 26-02, which sets forth responsive actions, as follows:

- **Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)** – Establish comprehensive, community-based wrap-around services bringing health and other public services into the community;
- **Technology and Healthcare** – Prioritize and integrate healthcare technology needs into government-wide Information Communication Technology (ICT) development planning and implementation strategies;
- **Health Workforce Training, Recruitment, and Retention** – Grow our local workforce through health career track programming in high schools; provide livable wages and comprehensive benefits packages; finance education and training through scholarships and loan repayment programs; and
- **Health Workforce Regional Brain-Sharing** – Establish a regional licensure board and associated pooled funding mechanism to support cross-jurisdiction specialists and surge deployments in order to establish a regional provider network for VA services across the USAPIs.

The Leaders also endorsed continued efforts to implement the regional Health Summit focused on NCDs.

#### 4. Gender Equality Committee (GEC)

The Committee noted that it has progressed in alignment with MIF Resolution 25-04 in Pohnpei, FSM; tasking the GEC to develop the Micronesian Gender Equality Framework. GEC further shared a number of emerging issues that must be dealt with to achieve its goals, such as:

- Political will and resource mobilization in each jurisdiction as well as regionally;



- Establishing accountability mechanisms at the national and sub-regional level in order to foster implementation planning and monitoring, evaluation, and learning; and
- Streamlining and aligning national, regional, and international commitments and reporting processes:

The Leaders supports the works and recommendations of the Committee and, congratulated it on its rapid advancement and endorsed the recommendations of the Committee, as follows:

- Assign GEC to serve as the oversight mechanism for the implementation of the MIF Gender Equality Framework;
- Mainstream Gender Equality by having GEC work with other MIF Committees to integrate gender equality issues into the work of the Committees; and
- Endorse in-country consultations for the development of the MIF Gender Equality Framework.

#### **5. Regional Tourism Committee**

The Regional Tourism Committee reported to the Leaders on their activities over the past few years and their work with and through PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association) Micronesia and demonstrated the broad effort to market Micronesia as a region. The Committee noted that tourism marketing is undertaken at a regional level with strategies that are environmentally sensitive, respect Micronesian cultures, adhere to high operational standards, and provide opportunity for education, training, and gainful employment, and that there are pressing issues Micronesia must overcome and address to return to pre-COVID levels:

- Slow resumption of tourism in the islands is affecting the tourism sector;
- Disruption in the tourism industry supply chain due to the loss of qualified workers who have left the islands or sought other employment;
- Weakening of the currency in key markets such as Japan, Korea, and the Philippines makes other more affordable destinations more desirable;
- Lack of air connectivity to and from other markets continues to pose a challenge in growing tourism arrival numbers in the region;
- Workforce development and upskilling;
- Competition in Asia and around the world are spending more on marketing and promotions to attract new visitors; and
- Regional, global, and natural environmental threats are threatening our ability to grow tourism arrivals to our region and our efforts to maintain sustainable tourism practices.

The Leaders recognized the urgent need to re-invigorate the Micronesian tourism industry and to overcome the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. They endorsed the recommendations of the Committee to improve and increase regional collaboration, as follows:

- Undertake a regional Website redesign ([micronesiatour.com](http://micronesiatour.com));



- Seek to undertake full participation of all NTOs and STOs with Chapter activities;
- Establish a Secretariat and identification of potential funding sources;
- Support NTOs' and STOs' participation in key travel trade and consumer events targeting key market, including,
  - The Asia Dive Expo (Consumer),
  - The PATA Travel Mart (B2B),
  - The Diving, Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) Show;
- Invest in respectful development efforts focused on historical and heritage sites, community-based tourism, and local cultural producers (possibly consider taking the Annual FSM Expo and turning it into a regional MicrONeSia Expo that can be hosted by different islands each year);
- Explore niche market opportunities such as educational and heritage tourism as a template for slowing out-migration and bringing Micronesians back to Micronesia (The Guam Liberation Homecoming promotion with GVB and United may serve as a good template to consider bringing MicrONeSians back to MicrONeSia);
- Invite Nauru to become a member of the PATA Chapter, and with the support of our island leaders, to have the NTOs consider becoming members of PATA international.

## **6. Committee on Trade**

The new Committee on Trade was not well represented and needs time to mobilize potential participants over the next year and to review the potential scope of the Committee's work.

The Leaders recognized the difficulties in establishing a new committee and in establishing the appropriate focus of its work. The Leaders therefore agreed to allow the Committee to work on identifying participants and developing the scope of its work prior to the next meeting. The Leaders endorsed the Committee's initial recommendations to:

- Revisit relationship with airlines and assess budget for cohesive pilot project in regional trade to benefit all industries;
- Review and set collective priorities for Undersea submarine cables (e.g. cybersecurity, trunk access, etc.);
- Develop a 5 Year Regional Small Business Strategy;
- Commit to a trade driven meeting once a year;
- Recruit members from the private sector: technology, banking, and transportation; and
- Identify grant funding opportunities to support different initiatives.

## **7. Regional Transportation Committee**

The Transportation Committee reported on the many emerging issues faced in the area of regional transportation, including:



- The Global Aviation (ICAO, ACI, & IATA) and Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent Net Zero Carbon Emissions by 2050 Goal, and
  - in this context, the related funding opportunities from external organizations focusing on climate change action and adaptation;
- The need for establishing new and improved air and maritime transportation services to remote inhabited islands;
- The need to address potential increases in shipping costs related to international requirements associated with carbon emissions reduction;
- The challenges to acquiring essential capital assets such as STS Gantry Cranes (Seaports);
- Build America, Buy America (BABA) waiver requirements on federal funds usage; and
- The need to have updated navigational maps of individual islands/nations waterways.

The Leaders recognized the considerable challenges faced in the various transportation areas and endorsed the following Committee recommendations to:

- Commit to net zero carbon emissions in air and maritime transportation by 2050 and consider pursuing funding opportunities that align with such goals;
- Foster an attractive and sustainable airline and maritime transportation environment, including -
  - Promotion of investment of resources in infrastructure and human resource capacity and training, including youth programs, and
  - Encouragement of government support that may include mechanisms in the transition from fossil fuel usage to alternate clean energy sources in the private sector and government incentives where applicable;
- Endorse a request to the Department of Defense to consider approval of the purchase of key capital assets such as STS Gantry Cranes from World Trade Organization (WTO) partners in the interest of national security;
- Create a Micronesian Aviation Leaders Association to -
  - promote aviation development and safe, secure, resilient, efficient, and sustainable air transportation,
  - collaborate and coordinate among member jurisdictions to improve workforce development and training and thereby improve air service connectivity, and
  - create distinct but collaborative goals (1) locally for each member jurisdiction, (2) regionally within and between Micronesia and the greater Pacific, and (3) internationally;
- Consider and foster collaboration and participation in the International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH) that developed its World Ports Sustainability Program (WPSP) and the Association of Pacific Ports;
- Develop and adopt government policies that will guide Micronesian islands/nations to identify, address, and implement mitigation measures to safeguard the environment and infrastructure from climate change, sea level rise, and carbon emissions;



- Address, in future forums, the carbon emissions in the land transportation sector; and
- Continue to elevate the Port Authority of Guam's (PAG) strategic importance to DOD's Pacific Deterrence Initiative to federal agency partners and key policy makers.

The MIF Leaders expressed concern to United Airlines and the FAA and the U. S. Department of Transportation that airline travel in Micronesia is among the most expensive in the world and encourages exploration and expansions of affordable airline services in the region and endorsed Resolution 26-03 recommendations as follows:

- The Leaders demand fair and reasonable pricing, and seek to begin a dialogue regarding the establishment of market comparable pricing that is fair and reasonable that will encourage air travel to Micronesia;
- The Leaders urge appropriate U. S. Government regulators to review the serious concerns expressed in this resolution, and open dialogue with the Micronesia Islands Forum to explore remedial measures to improve airline service that encourages affordable air travel to Micronesia; and
- The Regional Committee on Transportation with the assistance and partnership of Australia, Nauru, and Fiji, the Micronesia Islands Forum explores other potential airline services to Micronesia, including the expansion of current air transportation routes and services.

The Leaders also developed MIF Resolution 26-01 ensuring the continued recovery, investment, and expansion of environmentally and financially sustainable air and maritime transportation in the Micronesia Region for economic and social needs and priorities, and the promotion of safe, secure, clean, resilient, affordable and efficient transportation and increased connectivity between the Islands and Pacific Nations of Micronesia.

## **8. Ocean Committee**

The new Ocean Committee held its first meetings after conducting initial pre-Annual Meeting discussions. The Committee, during these discussions, identified potential priority topics for guidance from Leaders. The Committee identified a number of emerging issues related to Oceans that will require future discussion, analysis and action. These include:

- Marine Debris;
- IUU Fishing;
- Deep Sea Mining; and
- Climate Change Impacts:
  - Near Shore Reef Fisheries & Pelagic Fisheries and
  - Nuclear contamination.

The Committee requested guidance on these priority issues and requested future funding/technical assistance to formulate a Terms of Reference for the Committee, as well as a Strategic Plan.



The Leaders recognized the critical importance of the Ocean to our island jurisdictions and further recognized that the Oceans Committee is new and needs time to develop its focus. The Leaders directed the Committee to move forward with its development and activities and endorsed the Committee's intent to formulate a Terms of Reference and to develop a Strategic Plan moving forward and recommended that the Committee source potential funding from both Regional and International donors.

### **9. Information Communication Technology Committee (ICT)**

The ICT reported on the current issues facing the region in the area of communications and developed a 'Declaration on Digital Transformation of Micronesian Islands' that stressed the need to be united in our shared aspiration for a well-connected, prosperous, and secure region. The Committee recognized the diverse stages of ICT and digital transformation development across Micronesia, the existing connectivity gaps, the vulnerability of Micronesia due to cyber and environmental threats, and the need to determine and fortify critical infrastructure, including critical information infrastructure. Recognizing these unique regional difficulties, the Committee called for increased regional solidarity and commitment to address regional challenges and threats, to advance our objectives at all levels, and to leverage contributions by stakeholders through ICT and digital transformation.

Leaders agreed that telecommunications are a critical element of the region's economic development and endorsed the recommendations of the Committee to:

- Support the work of the various existing regional governance structures that coordinate and cooperate on the development of ICT in Micronesia;
- Call on the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and other development partners to strengthen understanding of, and engagement and presence in, the Micronesia region, and invite those partners to scale up cooperation in resource mobilization to support Micronesia Island States and Territories;
- Strengthen the various existing regional governance structures that coordinate and cooperate on the development of ICT in Micronesia, including the dedicated Micronesia ICT Working Group membership; and
- Instruct the Senior Officials to develop a Micronesia ICT and Digital Transformation Action Plan, supported by a dedicated Secretariat, resulting in an Action Plan to be reviewed at the next Micronesia ICT Ministerial Dialogue in 2025 to monitor progress and implementation.

MIF Leaders emphasized the need to tap expertise in cybersecurity and corresponding funding assistance. They recognized the importance of making use of international partnerships and collaboration, including in particular, through the INTERPOL, the Pacific Fusion Centre based in Vanuatu, and the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Center (PTCCC) based in Samoa.





They also acknowledged the importance of a collective cybersecurity framework for the region, exchange of information, and sharing.

The Leaders developed a MIF resolution 26-04 Working together to jointly secure communications resilience for the region.

### **10. Regional Energy Committee**

The Regional Energy Committee reviewed developments in each of our jurisdictions and reported on jurisdictional updates on frameworks for renewable energy integration into power grids throughout Micronesia. The Committee reported that the islands are experiencing very similar movements towards achieving 100% renewable goals. The frameworks for this renewable integration have been designed, and the goals are as follows:

- Guam – 100% by 2045: Guam 100 Study & Guam Clean Energy Masterplan;
- Palau – 100% by 2050: Palau Energy Roadmap;
- CNMI – 100% by 2045: Empowering People – Solar for Marianas Residence;
- FSM – 70% by 2030: Energy Policy & Master Plan;
  - FSM also has a 2030 goal to provide 100% energy access to all states;
- RMI – Currently at 99% in the outer islands: RMI Energy Bill; and
- Nauru – 100% by 2050.

The Committees also reported on the emerging energy issues in our region, including:

- The development of grid stabilization in light of integrating renewable energy into current power grids, taking into account aging infrastructure and the need for sufficient battery storage;
- The High cost of fuel / High volatility = no control;
- The high cost of trans-shipment / supply chain; and
- The need to grow a trained labor force.

The Leaders recognized the importance of expanded sustainable renewable energy capacity and the improvement of island grids and endorsed the following recommendations of the Committee:

- Create and adopt a Regional Energy Security Plan;
- Expand Energy Resilience Investments (policy & funding) in renewable energy and grid stabilization -
  - Explore larger incentives for ratepayers who invest in renewable energy, including tax credits, low-interest loans, and rebates;
- Investigate regional bulk procurement of fuel;
- Formalize an Association of Micronesia Utilities (AMU) and mandate participation -



- Establish Micronesia Electrical Standards, including policies for energy efficiency & electrical standards regulating imported items imported into the region (appliances, vehicles, equipment, etc.);
- Establish a framework for addressing the future of renewable energy integration; and
- Expand MIF working group support and funding.

The Leaders reaffirm the need to champion promoting gender mainstreaming in the energy sector and call on all PICTs and relevant partners to jointly pursue the goal of a more gender diverse labor force. The Leaders also recognize the importance of gender-responsive policies and programming in the renewable energy sector and acknowledges the outcomes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pacific Regional Energy & Transport Ministers Meeting in 2023 (Efate Outcomes Statement) in recognizing the Pacific Energy and Gender Strategic Action Plan (PEGSAP) 2020 – 2030 as a pathway for gender mainstreaming in the energy sector for Micronesia.

### **11. Micronesia Challenge (MC)**

The Micronesia Challenge reminded the Leaders of the original commitment of the Micronesia Challenge “to effectively conserve at least 30% of the near-shore marine resources and 20% of terrestrial resources across Micronesia by the year 2020”. In 2019, the Chief Executives re-committed and broadened the MC by committing to effectively manage 50% marine (to the edge of the EEZ) and 30% terrestrial resources. The MC noted that Conservative estimates show that the MC raised or leveraged over \$82M for conservation efforts in the region between 2006 and 2020 and that The Micronesia Challenge led the world in developing regional measures and monitoring the progress of our 2020 goals. The MC also reviewed successful activities in all of its jurisdictions.

To maintain this success, The MC Steering Committee has been working to update the Regional Sustainable Finance Plan, which includes new scenarios to consider for ensuring long-term financial sustainability.

The Leaders recognized the enormous accomplishments of members through the Micronesia Challenge Initiative over the past 18 years and applauded this collective approach to address critical issues such as sustainable livelihoods, fisheries management, enforcement capacity, and climate-related disaster risk reduction and management.

The Leaders endorsed the MC’s efforts and recommendations to:

- Update the Regional Sustainable Finance Plan (RSFP) reaffirming their commitment to:
  - Collaborate with their respective legislative bodies to allocate annual funding for effective conservation and management,
  - Make continued contributions to the MC endowment to supplement annual needs, to leverage innovative finance mechanisms identified in the updated RSFP to



- mobilize financial capital and secure additional funding for the MC Endowment to supplement annual revenue from complementary revenue streams,
- Further develop sustainable finance plans in each of their jurisdictions, refining the generalized regional approach to their unique contexts, and
  - Identify jurisdictional sustainable finance coordinators/champions to support the implementation of an agreed set of recommendations, and:
- The development of an MC registry to showcase the status of a variety of metrics to a diverse audience;
  - The expansion of MC's regional monitoring efforts and reporting on progress toward our ambitious 2030 conservation goals;
  - The update of the Regional Sustainable Finance Plan, which includes new scenarios to consider for ensuring long-term financial sustainability;
  - The continued collaboration by the MC and Leaders with your respective legislative bodies to allocate annual funding for effective conservation and management;
  - The continued contributions to the MC endowment to supplement annual needs will sustain healthy and resilient resources into the future; and
  - The re-examination of our global commitments through a regional and cultural lens and their adaptation to a locally meaningful level.
  - The convening of a regional meeting, led by Ministers, Secretaries or equivalents, to discuss and agree on definitions, approaches, specific targets and related costs for the new components of the Micronesia Challenge 2030 endorsed at the 24<sup>th</sup> MIF and an overall fundraising strategy to support the work required to achieve these expanded goals.

It was noted that the Micronesia Challenge had raised \$50,000 and needed an additional \$50,000 in order to match a grant application in which the donor would commit \$200,000. The Government of Guam committed to support the MC with \$5,000, and asked for commitments from other member governments. As a result, MC met its matching target with commitments from all member jurisdictions.

## **12. Regional Invasive Species Council (RISC)**

The Committee reminded leaders that the threat of invasive species to our natural resources is a threat to each of our unique island cultures. Invasives impact the health of our endemic species, diminish our native biodiversity, and threaten our food security and public health. These threats directly impact our identities as a people because our unique cultural traditions are founded on the sustainable use and management of our finite natural resources.

The RISC reviewed many of the milestones achieved over the past year by its member jurisdictions and highlighted the invasive species of highest concern in Micronesia, including the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle, Little Fire Ant, and Brown Tree snake.

The RISC also reviewed the emerging issues in our region, including:



- The need to expand committee efficiency through more frequent meetings with Designated Representatives and Leaders to assess their island invasive species council effectiveness and to identify mechanisms to make the committee stronger and more effective;
- The need to conduct more Micronesia-centric research and data collection on invasive species due to the existence of many gaps in basic Micronesia Invasive Species data and to build a comprehensive repository of regional invasive species data and resources; and
- The need for RISC to increase Micronesia's technical capacity to address the biological and climate threats to our natural resources.

The Leaders recognized the accomplishments of the RISC over the past years in working to limit and eradicate invasive species on our islands.

The Leaders endorsed the following recommendations of the RISC to:

- Secure sustainable funding for a permanent RISC Coordinator position;
- Communicate the MIF-endorsed 2022 PESC outcomes to the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF);
- Send a comprehensive letter from MIF Leaders to the U.S. President Joe Biden acknowledging the investments of the U.S. to the Micronesia region to address invasive species, climate change and food security, and further request specific support and funding as follows -
  - The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to fund independent Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) on behalf of the MIF states and territories associated with the U.S. military buildup in the region,
  - Encourage all regional U.S. Land Grant colleges to participate as active members of their state Invasive Species Councils and engage in the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) multi-state Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle regional project, and
  - Support the creation of the Pacific Biosecurity Collaborative (PBC);
- Update the Regional Biosecurity Plan (RBP);
- Finalize measures for the Micronesia Challenge Terrestrial Invasive Species Management Plans; and
- Pursue funding for and plan and coordinate Islands Biosecurity Workshops (Phase 2).

### **13. Pacific Islands Regional Recycling Initiative Council (PIRRIC)**

PIRRIC reported on the recycling accomplishments as well as the emerging issues on the MIF member islands.

PIRRIC further noted a number of common challenges across jurisdictions, including:

- Passage/Amendment of comprehensive modern recycling laws;
- Storage for used oil and end-of-life vehicles;
- Identification of potential dumpsites;
- In-house government recycling and shredding;
- Mandatory trash collection;



- Capacity building;
- Identification of markets for recyclables; and
- Affordable shipping costs.

The Leaders applauded PIRRIC and all of the islands for the improvements in solid waste management and recycling and endorsed Committee Regional Recommendations, to include:

- Capacity building with pay scales that are commensurate with industry standards; and
- Regional consolidation of recyclables for export to increase marketability and affordable shipping costs.
- The establishment of a PIRRIC Regional Coordinator Position in the MIFS;
- The implementation of government in-house 3R efforts towards zero waste; and
- The procurement, installation, and commission of more recycling-related equipment (i.e. multi-shredders, baling equipment, etc.).

### **III. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS**

#### **1. Workforce Development**

The Leaders opened the first Roundtable discussion on the issue of Workforce Development. There was a broad recognition that improvement of skilled labor was essential for the development of Micronesian jurisdictions. However, the priorities varied from island to island. Guam and the CNMI stressed the need to meet the demand of increased jobs and the lack of local labor to fill those jobs. For the Freely Associated States, the focus was on increasing wages in the context of limited budgetary resources, the shortage of trained workers, brain drain, and the need for vocational training. Within this context, numerous jurisdictions emphasized the need to realign their education systems to meet the needs of the private sector

#### **2. The Economy**

The discussion on the Economy focused on the oceans and the balance between conservation and economic development. It was argued that the islands have the resources to accomplish a combination of conservation and development. Many jurisdictions focused on the need to maximize partnerships to achieve their goals where resources are limited. While it was recognized that partnerships are crucial, it was also stressed that developed partners must be cognizant of the security issues that exist due to Climate Change and the role that the developed role have in creating the problems in the first place and their responsibility to reduce emissions.

It was also recognized that U.S. affiliated jurisdictions have different relationships with partners due to the closer association with the United States. This relationship brings both advantages and disadvantages economically and environmentally. The key is that all regional governments, regardless of their political status have access and participation in regional forums.



### **3. Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity**

The discussion on Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity focused on the unique issues facing Micronesia in this complex digital world. The Leaders recognized that our island governments need modern regulatory regimes that allow us to face these complex digital issues in the future. Cyberattacks have already been experienced by our island nations and appropriate responses are needed. Leaders recognized that the security of our governments are at risk. As our governments transition towards more sophisticated digital industries, cybersecurity regimes become ever more important.

Leaders stressed that our educational systems need to support the digital advancements of our economy and our technology. The Leaders also noted that our jurisdictions need the assistance of our donor partners and international agencies in upgrading our capacities and our laws. In addition, Leaders stressed that government offices need to be strengthened to protect our digital security and digital information capacity and to protect the people and businesses from cyber scams.

Finally, Leaders stressed that a regional response to cybersecurity issues should be developed, with the potential to create a Regional Cybersecurity Office and or Regional Cybersecurity Officer.

## **IV. OTHER MATTERS**

### **1. Report of the MIFS**

The Micronesia Islands Forum Secretariat presented its Annual Report. The Report provided an analysis of Revenues and Expenditures for the past five years. Revenues, at last accounting over this period, were \$825,000 and expenditures were \$501,280 leaving a balance of \$323,720.

The Secretariat also gave a brief report on the status of dues payments since the institution of dues in 2018. Currently, there are \$180,000 in dues outstanding through 2024.

In the area of fund-raising, the Secretariat reported that grant requests were authorized by the DRs and sent to a number of donor partners and friends, including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the U. S. Department of Interior. The MIFS awaits responses from these countries. Initial responses were received from Taiwan, China, and the DOI, and the MIFS awaits responses from the other countries.

The Secretariat indicated that Taiwan had responded positively to the bi-annual request for \$400,000. The Governor of Guam commented that the U.S. Department of Interior indicated a positive response and requested the Secretariat to follow through with further discussions with DOI.

The Report also informed the Leaders about the activities of the Designated Representatives through a series of in-person and digital meetings during the year.



The Secretariat reported on the status of the hiring of a professional Secretary General. The DRs worked with the Secretariat during the year and concluded that the position could not be advertised until additional funding is committed by donor countries at a sufficient level to guarantee the ongoing funding of the position and related staff.

The Secretariat reported on the status of a recommended Health Summit as recommended by Leaders. The Secretariat and DRs continue to work with PIHOA to establish a finalized Concept Paper and to source funding for the Summit.

Finally, the Secretariat reported that the Republic of Kiribati has yet to respond to the invitation by the Leaders to join the MIF.

## **2. MIFS Pledge by FSM**

The President of the FSM pledged \$200,000 to support the important work of the MIFS and in its efforts to establish a professional Secretary General to move the organization forward and strengthen and institutionalize the MIF.

## **3. MIF Organizational Agreement**

The Leaders recognized the compelling need for an organizational agreement to formalize and legalize the status of the MIF and directed that the Secretariat finalize such agreement for review by the DRs and then the Leaders.

## **4. Regional SPREP Office in the RMI**

The Leaders directed the Committees and the Secretariat to work to take advantage of and incorporate the work and capacity of the SPREP Regional Office to expand the work and capacity of relevant committees. Leaders are reminded of the commitments made in previous MIF meetings on the SPREP Northern Office. MIF leaders reaffirmed their support and commitment to the full operation of our SPREP Office, including nominal financial commitments. Officials must actively participate in completing the operation model and budget to guide the work of the office to address our environmental priorities.

## **5. Guam Green Growth**

Guam Green Growth provided an extensive presentation regarding the Guam Green Growth Program and offered assistance to initiate Green Growth Initiatives in other jurisdictions. The Leaders applauded the Guam Green Growth Initiative and endorsed the call to support Green Growth with other members.



## 6. Partnerships

The MIF Leaders acknowledged the presence and presentations of partners at this forum including **The Pacific Community (SPC), Local 2030 Islands Network, the U.S. Department of Labor, the East-West Center, and USAID.** The MIF Leaders encouraged partners to work with all the regional committees to align existing efforts and streamline resources to address issues and priorities.

## 7. Pacific Islands Forum

The MIF Leaders directed the Secretariat to initiate the invitation of the Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to observe the 27th MIF.

## V. CLOSING

### 1. Venue

The Leaders welcomed the RMI's offer to host the 27<sup>th</sup> MIF in 2025.

### 2. Closing Remarks

The Leaders all expressed their gratitude to Guam for hosting the 26<sup>th</sup> MIF and reaffirmed their commitment to their continuing partnership in the region.





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