

# 25TH MICRONESIAN ISLANDS FORUM

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

FEBRUARY 13 -17, 2023

*THEME: "TAKING ACTIONS TODAY FOR MICRONESIA'S PROSPERITY TOMORROW"*

## JOINT COMMUNIQUE

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), the U.S. Territory of Guam (Guam), and the States of the FSM, Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap.

### I. INTRODUCTION

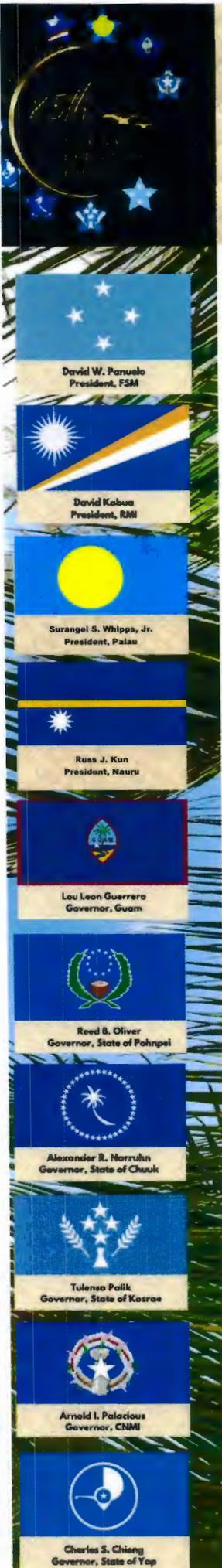
The Leaders of the governments of the FSM and its states, Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap, along with the CNMI, Guam, Palau, Nauru and the RMI held their 25<sup>th</sup> Micronesian Islands Forum Annual Meeting in Pohnpei State, FSM on February 15-17, 2023.

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.

His Excellency, the President of the FSM and Chair of the MIF, David W. Panuelo, expressed his appreciation to the Leaders and their jurisdictional representatives for their attendance and active participation in the 25<sup>th</sup> Micronesian Islands Forum. The Leaders expressed their collective appreciation to President Panuelo and the People of Pohnpei 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 25<sup>th</sup> MIF Communiqué.

Leaders welcomed the Republic of Nauru's attendance at the Annual Meeting. After consultation with his government, President Kun graciously accepted the invitation of MIF to become the 10th member. Leaders also confirmed their on-going invitation to the Republic of Kiribati to also become a member.



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## II. REGIONAL COMMITTEES

### 1. Micronesia Challenge

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”. It was noted that, at the 24<sup>th</sup> MIF, in 2019, the Leaders also endorsed the MC’s recommendation to effectively manage 50% of marine resources and 30% of terrestrial resources.

The MC reported a number of impressive accomplishments to date, including 72 management and climate adaptation plans, 65 socioeconomic assessments, 3,000 locals trained, and 70 new areas designated.

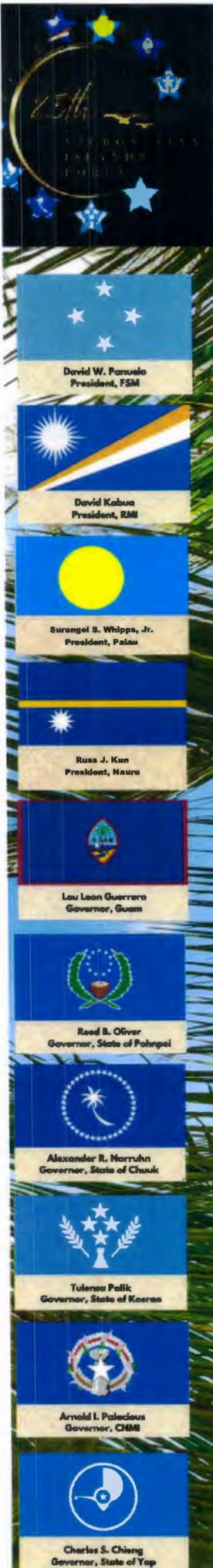
The MC also reminded the Leaders of the commitments made at the 24<sup>th</sup> MIF, including the following:

- To incorporate the regional and jurisdictional fisheries management approaches as integrated with Marine Protected Areas;
- To increase local investments by the MC governments in sustainable finance mechanisms, such as green fees and endowment funds;
- To institutionalize and fully resource the MC Regional Office; and
- To expand the MC Steering Committee to include two additional political focal points from each jurisdiction.

The Leaders recognized the enormous accomplishments of members through the Micronesia Challenge Initiative, and pursue a collective approach to address critical issues such as sustainable livelihoods, fisheries management, enforcement capacity, and climate-related disaster risk reduction and management. These updated targets are aligned with jurisdictional priorities and the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In support of these commitments, the MC reported that regional endowments currently totaled \$16.1 million of the target of \$55 million.

The Leaders endorsed the MC’s recommendations as follows:

- To reiterate their commitments made in the 24<sup>th</sup> MIF;
- To institutionalize the MC Regional Office through the appointment of political focal points to the MC Steering Committee (MCSC);
- To work with one another to jointly fund a \$100,000 match to the BRMC Scholarship Fund; and
- To institutionalize the appropriation and funding of the MCRO dues.



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## 2. Regional Tourism Committee

The Regional Tourism Committee reported that COVID-19 had a dynamic negative impact on tourism throughout the region and the world, including:

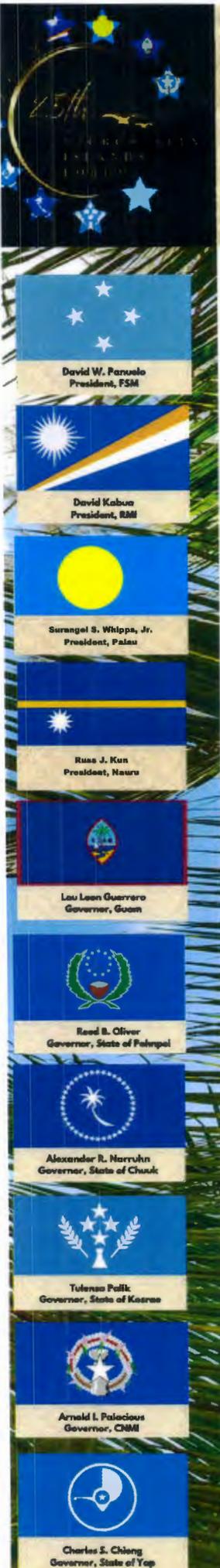
- Economic disruption of the tourism supply chain caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and slow resumption of tourism activities in the Islands;
- Health and Safety travel concerns;
- Increased competition in the Pacific Region; and
- Rising costs due to the pandemic and geo-political factors.

The Committee reported that the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) did not meet during the pandemic and the first meeting of chapter members occurred in December of 2022. The next meeting will be held in Palau in March of this year.

Due to these negative impacts of the pandemic, the Committee noted that there is a significant amount of work that must be undertaken to promote Micronesia as a region.

The Leaders recognized that tourism is a key opportunity for our Micronesian economies and that the work of recovering from COVID-19 requires immediate and regional attention. In light of this fact, Leaders endorsed the following recommendations of the Committee:

- Expansion of the Committee's scope of work to include Chapter Sub-Committee Work (Education Committee and Cultural Heritage Committee);
- Expansion of members' participation in tri-annual meetings of National Tourism Organizations (NTO's) and State Tourism Organizations (STO's);
- Expanded participation by jurisdictions at PATA International and PATA Micronesia Chapter Events;
- Support of PATA Micronesia Chapter Initiatives to conduct training and seminars throughout the region;
- Action by each jurisdiction to join the Pacific Tourism Organization (PTO); and
- Jurisdiction efforts to improve and enhance tourism destinations, to include:
  - Prioritization of funding for the revival of the region's tourism sector;
  - Support of a cooperative approach in promoting tourism on a regional level;
  - Digitize the travel services at borders to be in line with international standards; and
  - Continuously support and upgrade facilities and attractions.



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The Leaders also agreed that direct discussions be undertaken with partner countries to focus on direct flights to the region.

### 3. Pacific Islands Regional Recycling Initiative Council (PIRRIC)

PIRRIC reported on the recycling accomplishments of a number of the MIF jurisdictions. The Council noted that COVID-19 impacted regular services, causing slowed planning and implementation progress due to restrictions on travel and physical meetings, but noted that essential services continued, including recycling and waste collection services. PIRRIC further noted a number of common challenges across jurisdictions, including:

- The cost of shipping recyclable materials off island;
- Non-existent exportation venues for non-recyclable plastic bottles (Polyethylene terephthalate – PET); and
- Limited infrastructure systems.

PIRRIC stressed the need for sustainable funding mechanisms for overall Solid Waste Management activities, capacity building for all sectors of waste management activities, and the establishment of partnership with private sectors and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's).

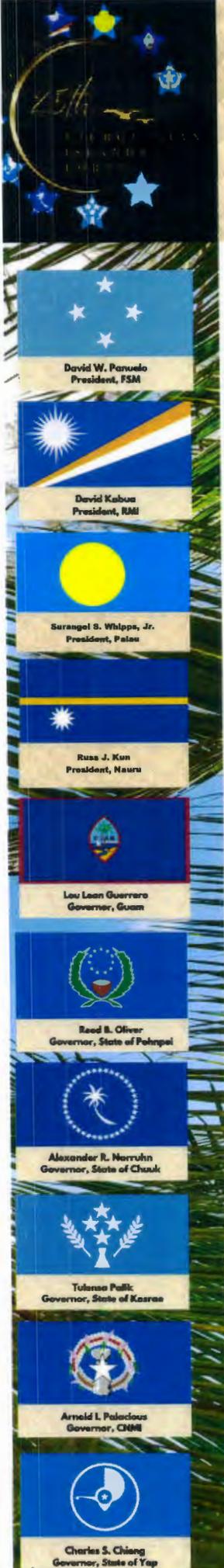
The Leaders applauded PIRRIC and all of the islands for the improvements in solid waste management and recycling and endorsed expanded regional cooperation, to include:

- Establishment of a PIRRIC Regional Coordinator Position in the MIFS after the identification of funding, and in line with such creation;
- The establishment of a PIRRIC Network organization and the development of a scope of work for regional recycling activities;
- The containment and disposal of used oil in the region; and
- The establishment of a Marine Debris Program.

### 4. Regional Health Committee (RHC)

The Regional Health Committee reminded the Leaders of the Resolutions of the 24<sup>th</sup> MIF regarding:

- Equitable access to comprehensive and quality healthcare services for Pacific Island veterans of the US armed forces and their families (MIF Resolution 24-01); and



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- The strengthening of USAPI health department capacities and systems to effectively address the health security threat of Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR) (MIF Resolution 24-02 and 03).

Each of these health concerns continue to exist and need further action in line with the resolutions. Within this context, the RHC reported on a number of activities that have occurred to support both services to Veterans and to respond to AMR.

The RHC reported that despite these successes, critical investments need to occur in a number of areas.

Leaders endorsed the recommendation of the RHC to follow-up on the RHC Resolutions relating to veterans and AMR.

Leaders further recognized the critical investment needs in each jurisdiction and in the region and endorsed responsive actions, as follows:

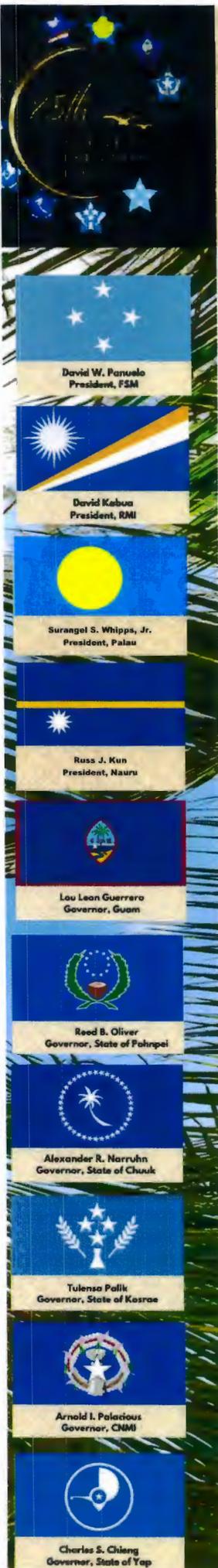
- Modernization and expansion of IT infrastructure and affordable broadband access to update existing health information systems (HIS), disease detection, monitoring and early warning systems and expansion of telehealth and telemedicine services;
- Improvement and expansion of Workforce Development, Recruitment, and retention as further set forth in their report;
- Strengthen ancillary services through a regional approach, including regional support for and use of Guam's newly planned Regional Public Health Laboratory facility;
- Reduce health disparities in remote areas and 'Hard-to-Reach' Communities; and
- Integrate Climate Change into health initiatives.

The Leaders signed three resolutions that support these activities and further recommend a prior Leadership Directive to move forward with a Health Law & Policy Summit to respond to all of these issues and to respond to the unique health problems faced in Micronesia due to Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD).

## 5. Regional Energy Committee

The Regional Energy Committee reported that the three primary issues in our region regarding energy are:

- Energy Security;
- Reducing Fuel Cost; and
- Grid Stabilization.



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Within this context, the Committee indicated that, due to the advanced age of our genset systems, the region needs to focus on:

- Integration of Renewable Energy into our power systems; and
- Stabilization of our power grids.

The Committee noted that new technologies in relation to battery storage can help stabilize the grid and recognized that Individual Power Producers (IPPs) and Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) can solve many of the obsolescence problems of old systems. The Committee therefore recommended that our utility companies work together to mitigate these problems.

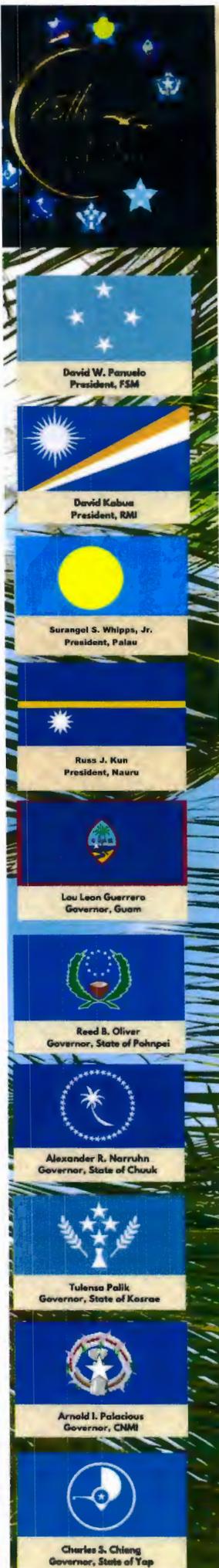
The Leaders recognized the need to cooperate to face these issues and endorsed the following recommendations of the Committee:

- Enhance information sharing and partnerships amongst all member jurisdictions;
- Develop and support pilot Individual Power Producers (IPPs) and Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) in Renewable Energy;
- Integrate the latest proven technology into national grids;
- Expand capacity building efforts and training in the Renewable Energy;
- Increase communication between committee members to ensure directives are actively reported and pursued; and
- Establish a Regional Energy Database.

#### 6. Regional Invasive Species Council (RISC)

The Committee reported on the achievements since the 24<sup>th</sup> MIF Annual Meeting.

The Leaders recognized the accomplishments of the RISC over the past years in working to limit and eradicate invasive species on our islands. In particular, the Leaders congratulated RISC for working with partners to organize the Pacific Ecological Security Conference (PESC) in Palau in October of 2022. At that conference, the participants demonstrated the critical importance of invasive species work (prevention, control, eradication, research) to building and maintaining climate resilience of our ecosystems, food security, livelihoods, cultures, and biodiversity. The PESC also developed strategic action plans to address three (but not all of) the most pressing invasive species issues (Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle, invasive ants, and biocontrol needs), complete with needed actions, funding and collaborations.



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The Leaders acknowledged the importance of U.S. support (particularly the Department of Interior and the Department of Agriculture) in implementing the outcomes and recommendations of the PESC, including capacity building (RISC, biosecurity staffing, training), direct funding and collaborative research efforts.

They also recognized the need to integrate invasive species efforts in Micronesia (by Micronesian Jurisdictions and US Departments) into the broader Pacific basin efforts by collaborating with Australia, New Zealand and others on programmatic and research efforts.

The Leaders endorsed the following recommendations of the RISC to:

- Implement the outcomes of the 2022 First Pacific Ecological Security Conference (PESC) including the three Strategic Action Plans from the PESC and to plan and facilitate the next PESC;
- Recruit additional biosecurity officers in each member jurisdiction;
- Seek action by the USDA to fund and reinstate the annual Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ)/Biosecurity regional training program in 2023;
- Seek US Forest Service grant funding from the University of Guam to finance an interim RISC Coordinator at UOG;
- Seek and identify five years of forward funding and hire a RISC Coordinator; and
- Sign a letter to USDA to reinstate the annual PPQ/Biosecurity regional training program to commence in 2023.

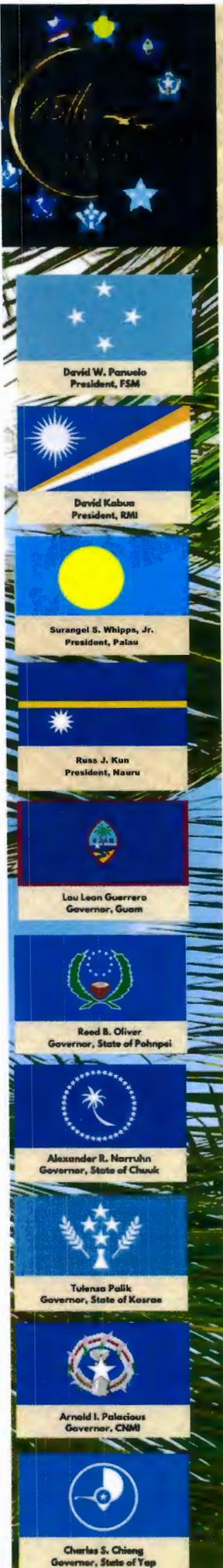
## 7. Information Communication Technology Committee (ICT)

The ICT reported on the on-going expansion of cable capacity throughout the region and recommended the continued development of such capacity in order to increase resilience and to reduce cable failure by creating alternate communication paths.

The Committee noted that accessibility, especially services in unserved and underserved areas must be prioritized. The Committee also noted that to generate revenue for respective island nations where submarine cables may land, there should be a MIF standard for landing fees and licensing.

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

- To ensure connectivity with capacity throughout the islands and the region;



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- To provide telecommunications accessibility to all residents, enterprise customers and anchor institutions with less regulation and more support;
- To pursue all means necessary to ensure reliable, resilient telecommunications services that are affordable for all;
- To strengthen telecommunications security throughout the region.

## 8. Regional Transportation Committee

The Transportation Committee reported that air transportation in the Pacific Region, especially since COVID-19, remains a major issue due to the lack of sufficient air services that provide convenient connections between the North and the South. The Committee noted that Leaders, in previous MIF Summits, supported Committee recommendations to call for actions to address these air service issues in order to pave the way for member jurisdictions to establish working groups to jointly initiate negotiations with regional airlines to provide these necessary air service routes.

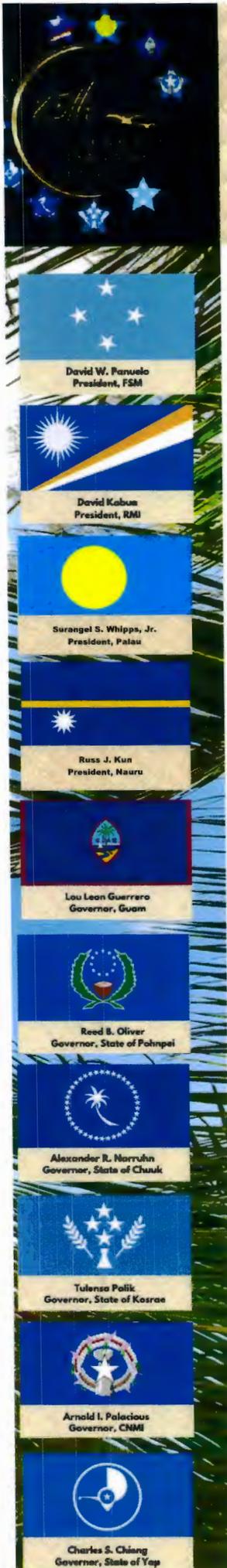
The Committee also noted that regional airlines, such as Air Niugini and Nauru Airlines, responded positively during COVID-19 by providing complementary air services to the existing air services to link South Pacific Islands with North Pacific Islands.

The Leaders recognized the importance of re-instituting pre-COVID flights and expanding upon these flights and endorsed a regional approach to liberalize our skies through bilateral engagements in the form of Air Service Agreements throughout the Pacific Island Nations and with interested airlines from both the Asian and US markets.

The Leaders fully appreciate the necessity for safety of air services and support the uncompromising strict imposition and enforcement of compliance to the highest degree provided by the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The Leaders also note the suspension of the services of Asia Pacific Airlines (APA) due to issues of pilot certification and stressed their grave concern regarding the impact that this suspension has had on the transportation of vital services and supplies to the people of Micronesia. Leaders request the Presidents of Micronesia to write a joint letter to the FAA to expedite the review and reach a swift resolution so that critical supplies and services reach our people.

The Leaders further endorsed the following Committee recommendations to:

- Foster an attractive and sustainable airline environment within each of our jurisdictions and within our Micronesian region;



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- Encourage government subsidies to reduce travel costs and expand air travel to our region;
- Liberalize air service routes to attract additional air carriers; and
- Establish multi/bilateral agreements through Air Service Agreements to conveniently connect regional destinations.

#### 9. Regional Workforce Development Council

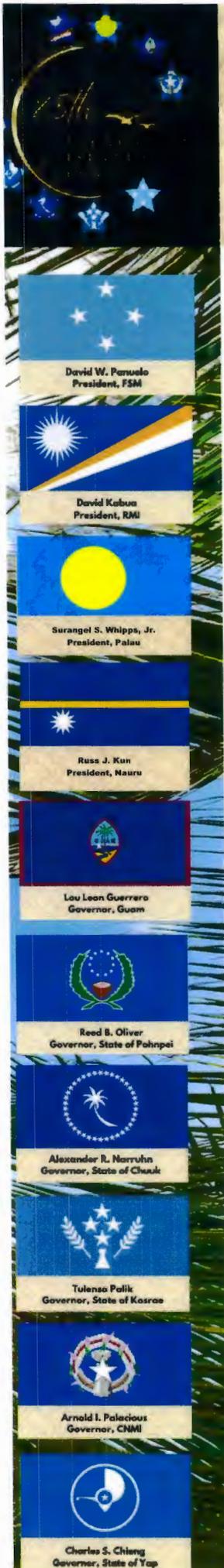
The RWDC stressed the need to develop productive workforces in all of the MIF jurisdictions in order to fully realize economic development goals. The Committee also focused on the need to reduce barriers to employment and to promote efficiency by fully preparing cross-jurisdictional employees to meet the challenges of employment in other jurisdictions.

The Leaders endorsed the recommendations of the Committee, as follows:

- To implement workforce development programs, in particular, to support the FSM Skills Academy (FSA) funded by the World Bank;
- To establish a governing council for the FSA and to encourage membership by MIF jurisdictions;
- To partner with NGOs that provide support services to the workforce, such as Mane'lu in Guam and Migrant Resource Center (MRC) in the FSM;
- To implement collaborative apprenticeship program on a regional basis and in all jurisdictions;
- To support the revival and continued funding of the FSM Migrant Resource Center (MRC) to acquaint migrants with social and cultural expectations, laws, and the culture and conditions of their destinations;
- To jointly request (by letter of Governors), addressed to the US Government, funding for WIOA to support a yearly Micronesian Workforce Directors Workshop to promote strong collaboration; and
- To Conduct an economic survey to determine job demands, wage levels & working conditions.

#### 10. Regional Education Committee (REC)

The new Regional Education Committee referenced the *UN SDG 4 Target 4.4*, which calls for substantial increases in the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship by 2030. The Committee also referenced *the Pacific Regional Education Framework 2018-2030: Moving Towards Education 2030 Policy Area 2*, a strategy to develop models for technical and vocational education. The Committee also noted that the 18<sup>th</sup> Micronesian Presidents' Summit authorized



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the FSM to lead the discussion on the establishment of the Micronesia Regional Vocational Center.

The Leaders recognized that the Regional Education Committee is a new committee and needs time to fully organize its efforts. Recognizing the potential for regional programs and cooperation, Leaders endorsed the recommendations of the Committee to:

- Establish a Micronesian Regional Education Summit to discuss regional education issues, including the promotion of online learning; and
- Support a Micronesian Regional Vocational Training Center in coordination with the Workforce Development Committee.

## 11. Gender Equality Committee

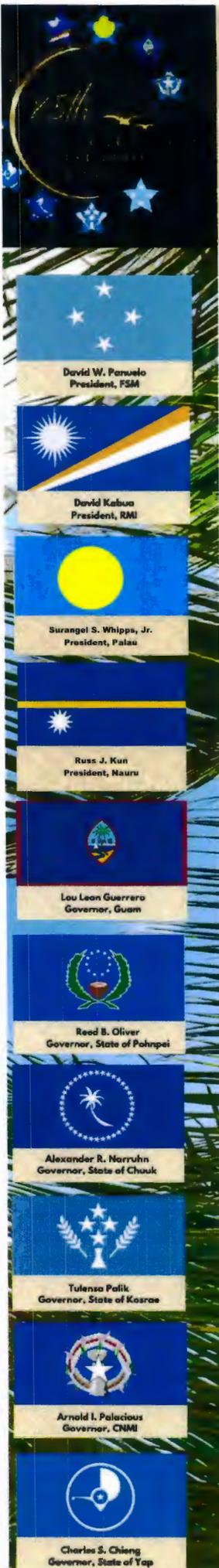
The new Gender Equality Committee held its first meeting and reported that the focus of the Committee would be on:

- Establishing Gender Policies;
- Increasing political participation of women across the region;
- Improving availability of maternity leave/paternity leave for government employees; and
- Recognizing that the underlying issues relating to gender equality related to resource and capacity constraints, institutional weakness, harmful norms and behavior and the prevalence of ‘Gender Based Violence’ (GBV).

The Leaders welcomed the initial work of the Committee and endorsed the recommendations of the Committee to:

- Support and endorse the strengthening of gender mainstreaming through sectoral work;
- Support the mobilization of resources to achieve gender equality outcomes; and
- Support and endorse the development of an MIF Gender Equality framework.

The Leaders also signed Resolution 25-04, which commits the jurisdictions of the MIF to strengthen gender mainstreaming, mobilize resources to achieve gender equality outcomes, and to develop a *Micronesian Islands Forum Gender Equality Framework*.



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### III. OTHER MATTERS

#### 12. Report of the MIFS

The Micronesia Islands Forum Secretariat presented its Annual Report, the first since the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting held in Chuuk in 2019. The Report reflected the lack of regional activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office in Palau continued to be staffed by the Administrative Officer. The Office also included the Regional Coordinator for the Regional Invasive Species Committee until the contract expired. The contract was not renewed due to funding limitations and the lack of authority from Leaders to extend.

The MIFS Designated Representatives met in September of 2022 for the first time since 2019 in order to prepare for the 25<sup>th</sup> MIF Annual Meeting.

The Secretariat reported on the financial status of the MIFS and indicated that the current fund balance housed in the Palau Treasury was \$161,774. The Secretariat also reported that it has prepared a communication to the Republic of China, Taiwan requesting the transfer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tranche of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Taiwan grant totaling \$200,000

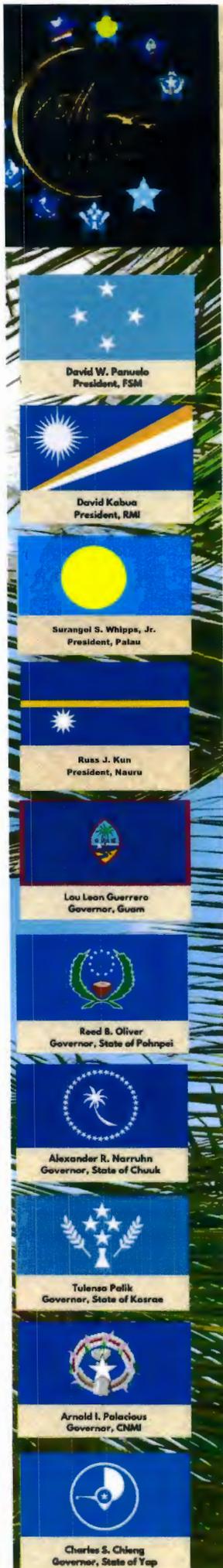
The Designated Representatives agreed to recommend requesting a third grant from Taiwan and to also seek comparable funding from other regional and international partners. A committee was established to move these requests forward.

Leaders re-affirmed their prior commitment to hire a professional Secretary General and appropriate staff to expand the capacity of the MIFS and to better follow-up and implement the Leaders agenda. Leaders also confirmed their commitment to identify long-term funding opportunities from Partners.

#### 13. Land Grant Treaty

The following is the proposed language for the College of Micronesia Treaty Extension to 2033.

*College of Micronesia's (COM) Land Grant Status is provided for in the Compact of each FAS entity with the U.S. COM Land Grant federal programs are operated thru the "Treaty Among the Governments of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated State of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau Regarding College of Micronesia". The Treaty was first executed in September 1987, amended in May 1989, extended in August 1991, amended again in July 1992. In December 1992, the Treaty was further revised and set to expire in September 2001 but was renewed in 2004, 2009, 2011, with the last extension in 2013 expiring September 30, 2023.*



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The Presidents of the FSM, Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands agreed, subject to legislative approval, to renew the Treaty for (10) years until September 30, 2033, as recommended by the governments' representative to the COM Board of Regents. This long-term extension does not preclude the three signatory governments from calling for renegotiation of any provision of said Treaty at any time between now and 2033.

#### 14. Pacific Islands Development Bank

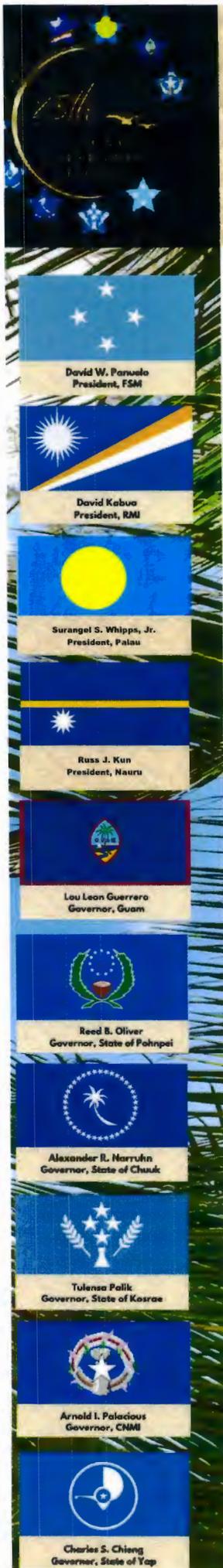
The Pacific Islands Development Bank made a presentation to the Leaders, providing a brief history of the Bank, that has now been in existence for 34 years. Over those years, over \$30 million has been loaned to Micronesian enterprises. After difficult years during the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in high default rates, the bank has stabilized and achieved modest revenues. In this post-pandemic period, new capitalization has been realized. To date, capital contributions from shareholders have totaled over \$14 million. The bank continues to leverage other sources of funding from regional and international sources. The Bank emphasized that it seeks to supplement, not supplant existing development banks in the region.

#### 15. Local 2030 Network and Guam Green Growth

A presentation was given by the University of Guam *Center for Island Sustainability and Sea Grant* regarding *Local 2030 Network and Guam Green Growth*. Referencing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the Local 2030 Islands Network, local, public and private partnerships were emphasized to meet the 17 sustainability development goals and practical Action Items of Island Sustainability. Ultimately, concrete actions were emphasized, such as food security efforts, protection of watersheds, workforce development, waste management and island clean-up to establish a new green economy throughout the region. Encouragement was given to all MIF Members to expand cooperation and partnerships to achieve Micronesia's Sustainable Development Goals.

#### 16. Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP)

The Pacific Islands Development Program, located at the East West Center, made a presentation to Leaders regarding its efforts to build capacity and to expand interchange between jurisdictions since 1989. As an East West Center program, the PIDP works to develop a more prosperous Pacific region and to strengthen regionalism. PIDP works closely with the East West Center education and leadership programs to accomplish its goals. The PIDP noted a newly funded program for leadership training.



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The PIDP is also a member of the *Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific* member (*CROP*) in association with the Pacific Islands Forum. Finally, PIDP acts as the Secretariat for the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders (PICL). The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent serves as the guide for PIDP's work.

## 17. Committee on Oceanic Resources

Leaders recommended the creation of a Committee on Oceanic Resources taking into consideration the new membership of the Republic of Nauru and the invitation of membership extended to the Republic of Kiribati.

## 18. Committee on Trade

Leaders also recommended the creation of a Committee on Trade to recognize the economic needs for increased.

## 19. Establishment of Workforce Development Agencies

Leaders recommended that member national governments establish workforce development agencies to improve the improvement and expansion of respective workforces.

## 20. SPREP Northern Office

Leaders are reminded of the commitments made in previous MIF meetings on the SPREP Northern Office. 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 environment priorities.

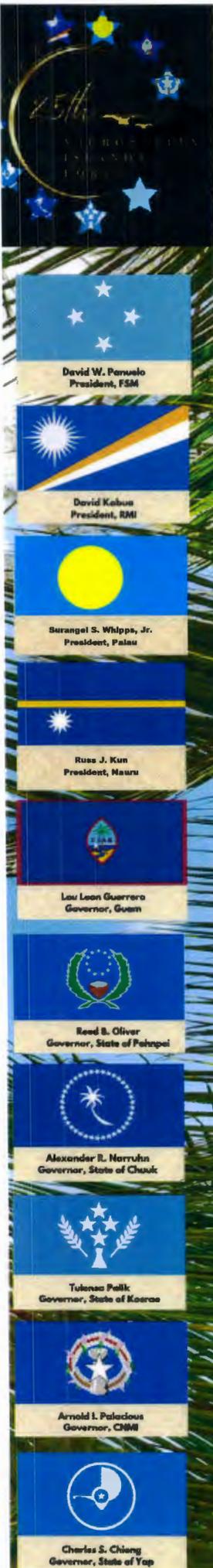
## IV. CLOSING

### 21. Venue

The Leaders welcomed Guam's offer to host the 26<sup>th</sup> MIF in 2024.

### 22. Closing Remarks

The Leaders all expressed their gratitude to FSM for hosting the 25<sup>th</sup> MIF and reaffirmed their commitment to their continuing partnership in the region.



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THEME: "TAKING ACTIONS TODAY FOR MICRONESIA'S PROSPERITY TOMORROW"



DAVID W. PANUELO  
President  
Federated States of Micronesia

MINISTER GUSTAV AITARO for  
SURANGEL S. WHIPPS JR.  
President  
Republic of Palau

DAVID KABUA  
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Republic of the Marshall Islands

ARNOLD PALACIOS  
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LOU LEON GUERRERO  
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ALEXANDER R. NARRUHN  
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