

Political Reviews

*Micronesia in Review: Issues and Events, 1 July 2015
to 30 June 2016*

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Reviews of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Kiribati, and Nauru are not included in this issue.

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

The period covered by this review was one of reckoning for the long-term sustainability of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) as a political and economic entity. The FSM engaged in a renewed effort to stimulate economic development, appreciate the fragile natural ecosystems long enjoyed and safeguarded by the people of the FSM, and reexamine the desirability of what is perhaps the country's most consequential bilateral relationship. As the scheduled termination of the major financial provisions of the amended Compact of Free Association (COFA) between the FSM and the United States nears, the FSM's national and state governments—as well as the general populaces they serve—grappled with the purpose, promise, and predicaments of the federation and strove, in various ways, to establish a solid foundation for a federation that would be independent in truth as well as in law.

From the outset of his administration, FSM President Peter M Christian exhibited a clear-eyed appreciation of the federation's challenges and shortcomings. During the joint inauguration ceremony on 10 July 2015 for President Christian, Vice President

Yosiwo P George, and the members of the Nineteenth Congress of the Federated States of Micronesia, the president delivered an inaugural address that blamed many of the federation's problems on "the intricacies of tiered governments where there are Municipal, State, and National jurisdictions all vying to serve the same constituents, but often tripping over each other because of unclear delineation of powers, coupled with political ambitions of three levels of legislative bodies." He also noted that the FSM was beset by difficulties stemming from "levels of disagreement between our country and other countries and international organizations whose interests in our affairs are not always compatible with our own." Christian warned his audience that, in the federation's long march toward self-government, "one significant road block that stands out for us is our inability to yet wean ourselves from paternal relationships" (FSMPIO 2015).

President Christian's remarks carried particular resonance in light of the attendees at the joint inauguration ceremony, including dignitaries from the United States, Australia, Japan, and the People's Republic of China as well as representatives from a number of regional and international organizations with long-standing financial and technical programs of assistance for the FSM (Yap Congressional Delegation Office 2015a). Notwithstanding such dire sentiments, the president

devoted much of his inaugural address to exhorting the people and governments of the FSM to work together “to achieve our nation’s goal: to give every citizen of the FSM an opportunity—not just a promise—but a real opportunity to build a better life” (FSMP10 2015). In its first full year in office, the Christian administration led the FSM in an effort to achieve that goal, with varying degrees of success.

Financial grant assistance and visa-free entry and residency privileges in the United States are arguably the main benefits that the FSM receives under the amended compact, but in the period under review, those components generated the greatest friction between the FSM and the United States. During the annual meeting of the Joint Economic Management Committee (JEMCO) on 1 September 2015, the United States majority on the committee made cuts of millions of dollars to FSM requests for grant assistance in support of public-sector capacity building, private-sector development, and infrastructure development, including disapproving \$50 million for infrastructure development (FSMIS, 21 Sept 2015). JEMCO’s cuts were not unprecedented, joining a long history of aggressively questioning and reducing grant requests from the FSM, including suspending the bulk of infrastructure grant funding since 2012. The FSM representatives nevertheless sharply criticized the committee’s actions, noting that infrastructure development was key to achieving the dual objectives of “economic sustainability and budgetary self-reliance” under the compact. The US representatives did not relent, arguing instead that the United

States could not release the bulk of the requested infrastructure funding until the FSM produced an updated national Infrastructure Development Plan. The FSM eventually completed and submitted its plan (for fiscal years 2016–2025) to JEMCO in early October 2015, after years of consultations and crafting (FSMIS, 22 Oct 2015). In January 2016, JEMCO voted to approve \$119 million in infrastructure sector grants under the amended compact. Although the approvals were welcome news for the FSM, the administration groused that the grants were for infrastructure-related projects in the education and health sectors and not for other economic development projects not directly related to education and health (FSMIS, 17 Feb 2016). JEMCO signaled that it would entertain the other infrastructure grant requests in future JEMCO meetings, in line with the newly completed FSM Infrastructure Development Plan, but that remains to be seen.

The friction between the FSM and the United States over JEMCO decisions seemed to reach a boiling point as 2015 came to a close. In November 2015, prior to JEMCO approving \$119 million in infrastructure grant funding for the FSM, Senator Isaac V Figir, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee of the FSM Congress, introduced Congressional Resolution (CR) 19-155 requesting that President Christian terminate the amended compact by 2018. The resolution criticized the United States for “abus[ing] its majority” on JEMCO to take actions contrary to FSM interests and accused the United States of treating the compact as an “act of charity by the United States rather than a

treaty between two sovereign nations” (FSM Nineteenth Congress 2015–2017a). In accordance with Title Four of the amended compact and relevant legislation in the FSM, the FSM can unilaterally terminate the amended compact, but only pursuant to a plebiscite in which at least 75 percent of voters from each of at least three of the four states of the federation vote in favor of termination (COFA 2003).

CR 19-155 was the culmination of criticisms that Senator Figir had lodged against the FSM’s relationship with the United States for more than a decade, stretching back to the negotiation of the amended compact from 2001–2003, particularly with regard to the JEMCO process and what he perceived to be the process’s infringement on the sovereignty and dignity of the FSM (*KP*, 30 Nov 2015). Interestingly, the recent resolution mirrored CR 17-61, introduced in 2011 in the FSM Congress by then-Senator Peter Christian—the lead negotiator of the FSM during the negotiations for the amended compact. CR 17-61 was never adopted by the FSM Congress. As of press time, the FSM Congress had not acted on CR 19-155.

Figir’s proposed resolution touched off a firestorm of reactions inside the FSM as well as abroad, including in Guam, Hawai‘i, and other parts of the United States with sizable residential populations of FSM citizens. Perhaps the sharpest flashpoints occurred in Guam, the US jurisdiction nearest to the FSM and therefore a major destination for FSM migrants seeking employment, education, and health care (*PDN*, 8 Feb 2016). In a survey of the FSM population residing in Guam that was conducted by an educator at

the University of Guam and released in late February 2016, nearly all of the 180 respondents disapproved of terminating the amended compact, as requested by CR 19-155 (*GDP*, 29 Feb 2016). Lawmakers in Guam seized on a passage in the resolution that cited a request by the US Senate Committee on Appropriations that the US Department of Homeland Security “consider establishing a pre-screening process and requiring advanced permission for prospective travelers from the Federated States of Micronesia and other Freely Associated States to enter the United States” (FSM Nineteenth Congress 2015–2017a). The Guam Government had made a similar request to the US federal government, in part to screen out FSM migrants who were convicted of crimes in the FSM, and in part to keep out unhealthy FSM migrants who would place significant strains on welfare services in Guam (*PDN*, 5 Dec 2015). CR 19-155 turned into a hot-button political issue in Guam, with Guam Senator Frank Blas Jr, pressing Congresswoman Madeline Bordallo—Guam’s representative in the US Congress—to specify her stance on the resolution and the significant impact its adoption would likely have on Guam (*KUAM*, 14 Dec 2015). Bordallo recalled her recent legislation introduced in the US Congress allocating increased financial assistance from the US federal government to Guam and other US jurisdictions impacted by the influx of FSM migrants, particularly migrants that utilize welfare services in those jurisdictions. Guam seemed to be uniquely positioned to receive any such additional assistance—for one, more than half of the homeless population in Guam at

the beginning of 2016 was from the FSM, especially Chuuk (*GDP* 8 June 2016). Indeed, Guam Governor Eddie Calvo had previously warned the US federal government—particularly the Department of the Interior, which has immediate jurisdiction over Guam and the Freely Associated States (FAS) of FSM, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau—that Guam had reached a “breaking point” in providing government services to migrants from the FSM and other FAS, including \$50 million per year for the education of the children of migrants from the FAS (*PDN*, 3 July 2015).

In response to strong expressions of bewilderment and disapproval by many FSM citizens who resided in the United States and feared that their visa-free immigration privileges in the United States would be revoked on termination of the amended compact, members of the Christian administration conducted a forum in Guam in February 2016 to explain CR 19-155 and discuss its possible ramifications. The Christian administration was represented by, among others, Lorin S Roberts, the FSM secretary of foreign affairs; Jose Gallen, the FSM attorney general; Leo Falcam Jr, chief of staff for President Christian; and Asterio Takesy, the former FSM ambassador to the United States. While Secretary Roberts assured the forum attendees that the congressional resolution was only a “draft” on which no action had been taken, Chief Falcam warned that the effects of terminating the amended compact would be “fairly far reaching, especially when it comes to immigration and those programs [FSM] citizens can take advantage of when they’re living abroad in the United

States or its territories.” Ambassador Takesy reminded the attendees that the financial provisions of the amended compact are already scheduled to expire in 2023, but even with advance notice of that predetermined termination date, the FSM stood to face an annual fiscal shortfall of about 30 to 40 percent compared to current funding levels; terminating the amended compact prior to 2023 would likely place the FSM in an even deeper fiscal hole (*KUAM*, 22 Feb 2016).

With the prospect of the federation prematurely disassociating itself from the United States, the Christian administration stepped up its efforts to secure financial, technical, and programmatic assistance and investments from foreign entities, including other countries. Vice President George led an FSM delegation in September 2015 to the Second India Forum for Pacific Islands Cooperation, where the government of India presented a donation of \$200,000 to the FSM Department of Resources and Development for the “FSM Integrated Agriculture Census” (*FSMIS*, 14 Sept 2015). In November 2015, Vice President George received executives from Able Overseas Reinsurance Company, a Japanese entity that is one of several captive insurance companies operating in the FSM and generating significant revenues for the FSM (*FSMIS*, 25 Nov 2015). The executives presented a \$10,000 donation to Vice President George to aid FSM recovery efforts from the devastating impacts of Typhoon Maysak in Chuuk and Yap. Beginning in January 2016, in accordance with an air services agreement with the FSM, Nauru Airlines began “same plane” services from Nauru to

Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Chuuk via Kiritabati and the Marshall Islands (*KP*, 29 Dec 2015), thus breaking the effective monopoly that United Airlines had had on commercial flight services in the FSM. And, in June 2016, the FSM joined other Pacific Island countries in negotiating a Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (*PACER-Plus*) with Australia and New Zealand in Nadi, Fiji. If adopted and implemented, *PACER-Plus* will formalize several types of financial and technical assistance that Australia and New Zealand will provide Pacific Island countries for trade-related purposes, include training in customs, conformity assessment, and the implementation of tariff commitments (*FSMIS*, 23 June 2016). Negotiations for *PACER-Plus* were scheduled to conclude by the end of 2016.

By far the largest non-compact-related donor source for the FSM during the current period was the government of the People's Republic of China. On 18 September 2015, in a signing ceremony attended by President Christian, Vice President George, and other key members of the Christian administration, the Chinese government formally turned over grant assistance of just over \$10 million to the FSM national government, which was earmarked for the purchase of more than a dozen vehicles and various other projects. The amount was the largest-ever grant assistance from China to the FSM, prompting President Christian to characterize the grant as a "sign of friendship and cooperation between the two countries" and a "good gesture of generosity" (*FSMIS*, 29 Sept 2015). On 21 December 2015, China donated medi-

cal equipment and supplies worth over \$130,000 to the Pohnpei State Department of Health Services in a signing ceremony in which the FSM was represented by Secretary Robert (*KP*, 21 Dec 2015). On 25 January 2016, a minister-led delegation from China participated in the 1st China-*FSM* Economic and Trade Commission in Pohnpei, wherein representatives from China and the FSM signed a memorandum of understanding regarding trade and other economic matters of mutual interest (*FSMIS*, 5 Feb 2016). In March 2016, the ambassador of China to the FSM notified President Christian of a forthcoming support package from China worth approximately \$1.5 million to aid the FSM in its efforts to address drought conditions caused by *El Niño*; the support package would include seawater-desalination equipment, portable generators, and water storage tanks, marking the largest-ever grant assistance from China to the FSM for disaster-relief efforts (*FSMIS*, 23 March 2016). And, also in March 2016, during a meeting requested by organizers of the 2018 Micronesian Games (to be held in Yap) to solicit donor assistance for the games and arranged by the FSM national government, the Embassy of China to the FSM essentially promised the organizers unrestricted funds, in contrast to the relatively parsimonious responses of the embassies of Japan and Australia and the non-participation of the US Embassy (*ABC*, 2 June 2016). China's growing influence in the FSM was evident, with China wielding economic largesse to strengthen its foothold in the FSM as the United States continues its pivot to Asia under the Obama administration.

While securing donations and investments from the international community, the FSM national government took significant strides in reaping economic benefits from the exploitation of a natural resource that fell under its jurisdiction: tuna fish stocks. The FSM convened a four-day National Fisheries Seminar in late May 2016 that proclaimed, in no uncertain terms, that “fish is our blue gold”—a clear reference to the lucrative annual revenues generated by the sale of fishing licenses by the FSM primarily to foreign fishing operators (FSM Updates, 24 May 2016). The seminar highlighted the intent of the FSM to generate up to \$85 million in annual fishing revenues in the near future, based on the sale of so-called fishing days by the FSM to fishing operators pursuant to the Vessel Day Scheme of the Nauru Agreement—a regional arrangement of eight parties (including the FSM) that, among other things, sets an overall number of fishing days for tuna in the maritime jurisdictions of its parties, establishes a minimum rate to be charged by the parties for each fishing day, and apportions the fishing days among the parties for eventual sale to fishing operators (KP, 15 Nov 2015). The Vessel Day Scheme aims to generate maximum revenues for Pacific Island countries while maintaining adequate conservation levels for the skipjack and bigeye tuna populations in their waters. In 2014, the sale of fishing days generated nearly \$50 million in revenue for the FSM, which was almost 40 percent of the total government revenues that year. The FSM aimed to ensure that such revenues would be utilized to maximize eco-

nomics development, especially as the scheduled termination of the financial provisions of the amended compact in 2023 approaches. After decades of fitful management of its fisheries, the FSM at last seems poised to obtain maximum value for its natural resources.

The success of the FSM and other parties to the Nauru Agreement in generating outside revenues for their fishing days ran into an unexpected snag when, in November 2015, the United States indicated that it would likely renege on an agreement it signed in August 2015 with the seventeen Pacific Island parties to the Pacific Tuna Treaty (including the parties to the Nauru Agreement), whereby the United States would pay approximately \$90 million to the parties for a certain number of fishing days for US fishing operators (KP, 1 Dec 2015). Specifically, the United States wanted to return nearly 2,000 of the 6,250 fishing days it had originally committed to purchase; the returned fishing days were worth approximately \$23 million (Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency 2015). With the fishing season scheduled to commence on 1 January 2016, and with the US operators failing to make their first-quarter payments by then, the FSM and other Pacific Island parties refused to issue fishing licenses to US operators in time for the opening of the fishing season, thus shutting out the US tuna fleet from the tuna-rich waters of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean—the world’s largest tuna fishery—for the first time in three decades (Yahoo! News 2016). Ultimately, in March 2016, after extensive negotiations between the United States and the

Pacific Island parties to the Pacific Tuna Treaty, the Pacific delegations agreed to the reduction in fishing days proposed by the United States in November 2015 and entered into a new agreement with the United States that locked in payments from the United States for multiple years (RNZ 2016).

As the FSM pursued efforts to secure the long-term sustainable use of its tuna resources, it also pushed the international community to adopt various measures to safeguard natural environments and their resources writ large, particularly from the ravages of climate change. At the 15th Micronesian Presidents' Summit held 14–15 July 2015 in Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), President Christian joined his counterparts from RMI and the Republic of Palau in exchanging views and information on a wide range of issues, including climate change, sea transportation, fiber optic cable projects, maritime boundary delimitations, and fisheries surveillance operations (FSMIS, 23 July 2015). Although the summit was Christian's first as FSM president, he had been instrumental in initiating the summit process nearly two decades earlier. Drawing on his familiarity with the summit process as well as his personal rapport with his fellow presidents, President Christian secured their agreement to support a push by the FSM for an amendment to the Montreal Protocol to phase down the production and use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), an initiative that the FSM had been championing for the better part of the decade. HFCs—primarily coolants used in refrigerators and air conditioners—are greenhouse

gases that are more potent than carbon dioxide when released into the atmosphere and whose elimination will likely prevent up to 0.5 degree Celsius of average global warming by the end of the current century (IGSD 2016). After years of tough negotiations, state parties to the Montreal Protocol were scheduled to adopt an HFC phase-down amendment in October 2016, thanks in part to efforts by the FSM and many other small island developing states.

In December 2015, President Christian led a sizable delegation from the FSM to Paris for the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC states parties negotiated and adopted the Paris Agreement, the first universally applicable international agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While at COP21, President Christian delivered an address that featured a story about a breadfruit tree overhanging a public roadway and damaging passing vehicles. According to the story, the owner of the breadfruit tree and the owner of a car damaged by falling breadfruit discussed the need to trim or remove the breadfruit tree as well as compensate the car owner for damage to his vehicle (KP, 16 Dec 2015). The story—being a clear reference to the historical responsibility of developed countries for the harmful effects of greenhouse gas emissions as well as the necessity of compensating developing countries like the FSM for the loss and damage they suffered due to climate change—mirrored the general tenor of the negotiations during COP21, with developed countries and a number of major-emit-

ter developing countries resisting the assumption of new and burdensome obligations under the Paris Agreement, and with developing countries—particularly small island developing states and the least developed countries—pushing hard for drastic emissions reductions, robust climate financial assistance, and compensation and liability for irreversible coastal erosion and other forms of loss and damage due to climate change. In the last few days of COP21, with many key contentious issues of the Paris Agreement still unresolved, the FSM joined nearly one hundred UNFCCC states parties in unveiling the so-called “High Ambition Coalition,” which included the United States and the European Union (Mathiesen and Harvey 2015). The coalition—which had coalesced over a year of secret talks—played a key role in securing a Paris Agreement that would, among other things, be legally binding, anchor a standalone mechanism for loss and damage, and—in a surprise to many observers of the years-long negotiations for the Paris Agreement—commit states parties to pursue efforts to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels (UNFCCC 2015). The 1.5-degree target was a major goal of the FSM and other small island developing states for the Paris Agreement, in light of the cataclysmic consequences posed by a greater-than-1.5-degree temperature rise, including coastal inundation from sea-level rise and severe weather events. On 22 April 2016, signaling the support of the FSM for the Paris Agreement, President Christian joined representatives from 174 other countries in signing the Paris Agreement at

the UN headquarters in New York—the largest-ever single-day signing of an international instrument (FSMIS, 27 April 2016).

In a sign of the seriousness with which the FSM views climate change, Speaker Wesley S Simina of the FSM Congress established a Special Committee on Climate Change just prior to COP21, pursuant to a congressional resolution (19-139) requesting the committee’s establishment (FSM Nineteenth Congress 2015–2017a). Several members of the FSM Congress were part of the FSM delegation at COP21, including Speaker Simina and Senator Figir, the chairman of the newly established committee (Yap Congressional Delegation Office 2015b). The establishment of the committee indicated a desire by Congress to become more involved in the FSM’s engagement with climate change issues, including on the international stage. Indeed, during the Fourth Regular Session of the FSM Congress in May 2016, Senator Figir questioned why the Christian administration had not yet transmitted the Paris Agreement to the FSM Congress for ratification more than a month after President Christian signed the Paris Agreement (Congress News 2016). Whether the involvement of Congress in climate change matters would complement rather than hinder the efforts of the executive branch remains to be seen.

Perhaps as a preview of the interactions between the FSM Congress and the executive branch on climate change matters, the national government engaged in a controversial back-and-forth in response to El Niño, a cyclical weather phenomenon that severely reduced rainfall and trig-

gered drought conditions in the FSM and many other parts of the world for much of the period under review. This El Niño was one of the strongest in decades, generating intense storms, bleaching coral reef systems, and driving drought conditions throughout much of the world (Thompson 2016). In early February 2016, Pohnpei—normally one of the wettest places in the world—suffered several days of water outages that were blamed on El Niño—caused drought conditions (*KP*, 11 Feb 2016). Similar drought conditions were reported in Chuuk and Yap, particularly their outer islands.

In response to the escalating nationwide drought conditions, President Christian signed a Presidential Emergency Declaration on 18 February 2016. The declaration, among other things, established a National Emergency Task Force to coordinate with state governments on relief efforts, activated a Disaster Relief Fund, and redirected \$200,000 in previously appropriated funds into that fund (*FSMPIO* 2016). However, on 29 February 2016, the FSM Congress unanimously adopted Congressional Resolution 19-192 (FSM Nineteenth Congress 2015–2017a), revoking the emergency declaration. According to the text of the resolution as well as the attached report (19-08) of the Special Committee to Wait on the President (which raised the issue of the declaration to the Christian administration) (FSM Nineteenth Congress 2015–2017b), Congress chose to revoke the declaration because it was signed before any of the governors of the four states of the federation had made their own emergency declarations in relation to El Niño, and

Congress preferred to defer to state government leadership in emergency relief efforts conducted as part of a coordinated national response (*MV*, 4 March 2016). However, some of the funds diverted into the Disaster Relief Fund by the Presidential Emergency Declaration were originally appropriated as travel funds for Congress. It was plausible that the revocation by Congress was motivated at least in part by the reallocation of congressional travel funds—an act that the president had the legal authority to do pursuant to his powers to issue and implement emergency declarations. In any case, shortly after the revocation, the governors of the four states made their respective emergency declarations, citing severe drought conditions, serious crop damage, and the sharp increase of drought-related disease, among other effects of El Niño (*PDN*, 14 April 2016). Whether the spat between Congress and the executive branch undermined relief efforts in the FSM—even temporarily—was a very real possibility.

In his inaugural address, President Christian expressed an evocative vision of proper governance for his administration, one that recognized the imperative of economic development while appreciating various roadblocks in that mission, including self-inflicted ones. With the tensions between the various levels of government in the FSM threatening coordinated national responses to pressing national and local issues, and with the continuation of the political, economic, and legal association between the FSM and the United States increasingly under fire, the period under review closed with the

FSM reassessing its historical ties to its natural environment and resources, its development prerogatives, and the United States, and preparing for a not-too-distant future in which it will no longer be able to rely on the amended compact to finance the bulk of its annual operations and development needs. Unity in the federation and political dexterity will be critical to navigating those rough waters, just as the ancestors of the FSM people relied on unity and specialized knowledge to navigate the expanse of the Pacific Ocean and settle its far-flung isles. Will such ancient history bear out, or will contentious recent history trump such progress?

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THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED *in this review are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the government of the Federated States of Micronesia.*

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GUAM

The year ended on a high note in Guam, as the island had the honor of hosting the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts (FestPac), 22 May–4 June 2016. FestPac, sponsored by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, is often called “the cultural Olympics of the Pacific.” Close to thirty Island nations come together to share their arts and culture with each other and the rest of the world. More than 2,700 delegates made their way to Guam for the thirteen-day event, which showed the breadth of cultural diversity of the Pacific and the various ways in which Pacific peoples are perpetuating and reinvigorating their heritages.

FestPac experienced early logistical issues. At the opening ceremony, delegates were forced to stand for hours without adequate access to food and water, and problems with meal vouchers, transportation, and accommodations also marred the event (*PDN*, 23 May 2016). These issues were soon eclipsed by the momentousness of the occasion, as FestPac was filled with a multitude of activities including performances, cultural demonstrations, lectures, creative readings, academic conferences, and film screenings. The first-ever Indigenous Language Conference at FestPac offered presentations and networking opportunities for scholars and community activists across the Pacific who were seeking to revitalize or preserve their native languages (*KUAM*, 27 May 2016).

The relationship between Chamorros and FestPac has sometimes been contentious. As Chamorros are the people of the Pacific who have experienced the longest history of

colonization, they are often perceived in the wider Pacific as having no culture. Decades of Chamorro participation in FestPac and exposure to those critiques of their cultural identity have pushed Chamorros to learn more about themselves as an indigenous people and to re-create certain traditional arts, most notably dancing (*PDN*, 23 April 2015). The cultural performance groups Pâ'a Taotao Tâno' and I Fanlalai'an were both formed as attempts to reestablish Chamorro traditional dance or chant, and they seized on FestPac as their chance to showcase their culture to the rest of the Pacific.

Guam has been without a national museum for several decades, and it was hoped that one would be open in time for FestPac. Some facilities were finished and able to be used for FestPac activities, but the majority of the Guam Museum remains unfinished. Although it was originally scheduled for completion in 2014, delays due to mismanagement and weather pushed the projected completion date to spring 2017 (*PDN*, 31 March 2016). In May 2016, Governor Eddie Calvo signed an executive order naming the museum after the late Senator Antonio Manibusan Palomo, a Chamorro author and former director of the museum (*GDP*, 4 May 2016).

During the FestPac closing ceremony, a group of a dozen Guam delegates unfurled two banners emblazoned with the words "Decolonize Oceania" and "Free Guåhan." Kisha Borja-Quichocho-Calvo, a professor at the University of Guam and one of the demonstrators, noted the statement was necessary "to demonstrate that FestPac is not just an event which

highlights the beautiful cultural facets of our Pacific communities. . . . It is also an event which should remind us of the historical and political struggles of our people . . . and the beauty in our ability to survive hundreds of years of colonialism" (*PDN*, 9 June 2016). Five of the islands participating in FestPac are formally listed by the United Nations as "Non-Self-Governing-Territories," and several others exist in neocolonial relationships without recognition (*PDN*, 18 July 2016).

While the demonstration was meant to provoke a response from the wider community of the Pacific, it was also aimed at Governor Calvo, who had, months before, taken an aggressive position on changing Guam's political status but did not appear to be carrying out his stated goals. In March 2016, during his State of the Island Address, Calvo made the bold move of declaring his intention to hold a political status plebiscite in November. In this non-binding vote, the Chamorro people of Guam would select between free association, independence, and statehood for Guam's future political status, and the results would be submitted to the US government. In his speech, he referred to nearly four hundred years of colonization as being long enough and said the time was ripe for the people of Guam to seize their long-deferred dream of self-determination (Calvo 2016).

Per existing local law, the Commission on Decolonization, of which the governor is chairman, is responsible for setting the date of any plebiscite, once it determines that the public is adequately prepared and that 70 percent of those eligible to vote are

registered. Calvo proposed instead using a public referendum process from the US Organic Act, which allows any private citizen to put forth any issue to the entire island community in the form of a vote (*PDN*, 2 April 2016). A collection of Chamorro rights groups formally informed Calvo they found his plan reckless, as the public referendum would take place within too short a time period, with no educational materials created or outreach infrastructure in place. His proposed referendum would violate both local and international law, as it would open the decolonization vote to the general public; the plebiscite is legally reserved only for “native inhabitants,” those who are the direct inheritors of the legacy of Guam’s colonization (*PDN*, 5 April 2016).

In April, Calvo met with the Commission on Decolonization to discuss his plans. While the commission was sympathetic to Calvo’s desire to move ahead on the issue, they lamented the fact that the governor, despite being the chairman of the commission, had not attended a meeting in four years. Calvo proposed that his office conduct an aggressive, three-month educational campaign. The commission would meet again in July, and if—through a series of public meetings, social media marketing, and distribution of educational materials—a significant amount of education had taken place, then a plebiscite would be set for November (*KUAM*, 6 April 2016). The July meeting was pushed back to August, as several members of the commission, from both Democratic and Republican parties, were off island attending the national party conventions in the United States.

Residents of Guam, whether indigenous or not, US citizens or not, are all denied the right to vote for US president, denied representation in the electoral college, and denied voting representation in the US Congress. The party conventions represent the only national political participation open to the people of the US territories (Gallo 2016). Madeleine Bordallo, Guam’s nonvoting delegate to Congress, highlighted the island’s liminal status at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia: “Madame chair, hafa adai from the island of Guam—a remarkably diverse community and the homeland of the Chamorro people. We have traveled over 8,000 miles and through nine time zones, to cast our only vote for the president and vice president. We want a president who is sensitive to our needs . . . a president that supports our rights for full self-determination and self-governance as ratified in the Democratic platform” (*GDP*, 3 Aug 2016).

With the conventions finished, the Commission on Decolonization met in August. The Governor’s Office had held no public meetings and conducted no surveys since April, and so the governor withdrew his proposal for a November plebiscite (*GDP*, 25 Aug 2016).

Governor Calvo’s rationale for pushing ahead with a plebiscite was in part because colonialism inhibits the island and its leaders from any input into the actions of the US military in its area. US plans to transfer relatively large numbers of marines from Okinawa to Guam have been controversial to the public, especially in 2009 when the US Department of Defense’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement

was first released. Approximately 6,000 military personnel and 6,000 dependents are currently stationed on Guam. The military already uses more than 28 percent of the island as fortified and highly controlled bases. The US military now proposes adding 5,000 marines and 1,300 dependents by 2022 and requiring the construction of housing and a live-fire training range near an ancient village, Litekyan, that is culturally significant to Chamorros (*PDN*, 1 Sept 2015).

After years of delay, in October 2015 the US Congress authorized the first release of funds for its plans in Guam, more than \$300 million for infrastructure projects primarily connected to improving the wastewater facilities (*PDN*, 4 Dec 2015). The environmental activist group Our Islands Are Sacred wrote to Governor Calvo expressing concern over potential negative impacts; as group member Moñeka de Oro put it: “regardless of whether this is good for Guam or bad for Guam . . . the biggest (problem) is we never were really asked if this is something that we wanted” (*PDN*, 22 Sept 2016). Calvo met with representatives of Our Islands Are Sacred, later saying that they had convinced him of the need for self-determination, especially prior to any further increases in the US military presence (State of the Island Address 2016).

Guam is oftentimes referred to as the “tip of the spear” by local politicians, military commanders, and national media, as its geographic location makes it key to US strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region (Fifield 2016). Guam is beset by rumors of wars and a regular shuffling of military assets. Throughout

the year, Guam found itself mentioned regularly amid saber rattling from China and North Korea. In May 2016, China revealed a missile dubbed “the Guam Killer,” capable of striking Guam (*PDN*, 13 May 2016). North Korea appears to be developing intermediate-range Musudan missiles, which it threatens would be capable of striking US bases in Guam (*GDP*, 24 June 2016).

China is threatening to increase its bomber and fighter flights in the contested South China Sea, so the United States is adding to its own aircraft firepower in the region. For the first time in a decade, the United States stationed B-1B bombers on Guam (*PDN*, 29 July 2016). In May 2016, a B-52H bomber crashed at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, but all seven of the crew survived (*PDN*, 20 May 2016). With North Korea regularly conducting missile tests as shows of force, a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) mission was established on Guam in 2013. South Koreans visited Guam’s THAAD mission in July 2016 to assess environmental risks, as the United States plans to install a similar mission in South Korea in 2017 (*PDN*, 19 July 2016).

US military spending is one pillar of Guam’s economy; tourism, another pillar, experienced a record-breaking year. More tourists visited Guam in 2015 than in any other year in the island’s history: 1,409,033 tourists put 2015 well above Guam’s previous record of 1,381,513 in 1997 (Pacific News Center, 15 Jan 2015). The Guam Visitors Bureau (GVB) noted that 2016 could easily break this record, however, with Guam hosting several large-scale events, most nota-

bly FestPac and the annual summit of the Pacific Asia Travel Association.

Japanese tourists are overwhelmingly the largest market for Guam tourism; however, in 2015, their numbers declined by 4.7 percent, with other markets performing above expectations. A record was set in 2015 for highest number of South Korean tourists—427,900—a 38.9 percent increase from 2014. Chinese tourists also experienced a significant increase to 23,698, a 45.6 percent increase from 2014. Mark Baldyga of the GVB noted that the banner performance of the tourism sector in 2015 and the record-setting monthly arrival numbers in the first half of 2016 all indicate that the island is on track to reach the goal of two million tourists a year in 2020, set by Governor Calvo in 2014 (*GDP*, 28 April 2016). Despite these increases, there is skepticism that Guam can reach that goal, as the island's colonial status prevents it from controlling its own immigration and visa system. China's out-bound tourist market is massive and relatively close to Guam, but tensions with the United States make it difficult for Chinese citizens to obtain visas to visit Guam. Local officials have lobbied for decades in Washington DC for a Guam-only China visa waiver, with no success (*PDN*, 27 April 2016).

The steady increases in tourism have been a result of new investment in the island, with new hotels such as the first luxury resort to open on Guam in over fifteen years, the Dusit Thani, and also the increase in flights to Guam by carriers around Asia (*PDN*, 6 July 2015). Not all new development, however, has been celebrated by the local community. In December

2015, plans were announced to build two residential towers, comprising more than three hundred condo units, on Págo Bay, the site of an ancient Chamorro village and already a rural residential area for several hundred people (*PDN*, 24 Dec 2015). Although local media and leaders initially celebrated this development, called the Págo Bay Marina Resort, from a Chinese group, Guam Wangfang Construction Ltd, public sentiment soon soured. Concerned residents referred to the plans in public meetings as a “monstrosity” that could incur environmental damage. More than one hundred citizens attended a public hearing in January 2016, and all those testifying opposed the development, citing concerns with infrastructure, traffic, alteration of the currently residential/forested landscape, and environmental degradation (*PDN*, 10 Jan 2016).

Despite loud public outcry, the construction was approved by the Guam Land Use Commission. Residents opposed to the development formed the group Save Southern Guam, which filed petitions for judicial review and injunctive relief in May 2016 (*KUAM*, 6 June 2016). Save Southern Guam proposed legislative measures to allow for more community oversight in the future, including requiring the approval of municipal planning councils for proposed projects under review by the Guam Land Use Commission. Several Guam senators have taken up this cause as well.

One possible economic venue for Guam, though mired in regulatory issues for the past year, is medical marijuana. Guam residents voted to legalize medical marijuana in

November 2014, with the Joaquin KC Concepcion II Compassionate Cannabis Act. The initial regulations were developed by the Guam Department of Public Health and released for public comment in July 2015 (*PDN*, 18 July 2015). According to feedback received, the public noted that the regulations did not allow for home growing, were too strict, and outlined steep fees for growers and distributors (*GDP*, 3 July 2016). In July 2016, Senator Tina Muña Barnes proposed bills to create a climate for the use of medical marijuana that would not lead to conflicts with existing rules. In August, her bills lapsed into law (*GDP*, 8 Aug 2016).

The past year saw a rift in one of the most powerful social and cultural institutions on the island, the Catholic Church. A new group called the Neocatechumenal Way drew concern as it seemed to receive preferential treatment from Archbishop Anthony Apuron. There were frequent public protests over the archbishop's treatment of priests critical of the group and his alleged gift of over \$20 million in Church assets to "the Way" (*PDN*, 19 Aug 2016). In June 2016, Apuron was placed on leave by Pope Francis after several men came forward claiming that Apuron had sexually abused them when they were children. Savio Hon Tai-Fai of Hong Kong is now the acting archbishop (Scammell 2016).

Guam Regional Medical City, a new 130-bed private hospital opened on Guam in July 2015, offering highly specialized services and equipment for conditions including heart attacks, diabetes, strokes, and cancer (*GDP*, 4 July 2016). The hospital has two hyperbaric chambers, used to hasten

the healing of wounds. Guam's public hospital has been plagued by budget overruns and other scandals. Operating the new hospital has proven difficult, as work visas for skilled labor have been denied or delayed, forcing the pediatric unit to shut down for three weeks (*KUAM*, 10 May 2016).

In sports, Guam made history with its first Asian Rugby Championship in a decade with a win over China in the Division 3 East. This earns Guam's team a promotion to Division 2 status; Guam had been ranked in Division 3 since joining the Asian Rugby Football League in 2004 (Guam Sports Network, 11 June 2015). Guam's paddling clubs Taotao Galaide and Tátasi earned spots at Va'a World Sprints in Australia, described as "the Olympics for paddling" by coach Josh Duenas (*PDN*, 26 March 2016). Guam made its eighth overall appearance at the summer Olympics when it sent five athletes to the 2016 Olympic Games held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Benjamin Schulte and Pilar Shimizu competed in 100-meter breaststroke events, Regine Tugade and Joshua Ilustre in track and field, and Peter Lombard in mountain biking (Guam Sports Network, 17 June 2016).

In September 2015, the island mourned the passing of author Jose Mata Torres, who died at the age of eighty-eight. In the final year of his life, Torres published his memoir, *Massacre at Atâte*, in which he discussed his participation in an uprising against Japanese forces in his village of Malesso' during the closing days of World War II in Guam (*PDN*, 30 Sept 2015). His account is one of the few records of this scarcely documented

portion of recent Guam history. In response to systematic massacres being conducted by the Japanese, a group of men under the leadership of Jose “Tonko” Reyes rose up to attack their captors and liberate themselves.

In February 2016, the island mourned a pioneer in the movement to preserve and revitalize the Chamorro language when Dr Bernadita Camacho-Dungca passed away at the age of seventy-five. She was the first and only Chamorro thus far to earn a PhD in linguistics, a coauthor of the Chamorro-English Dictionary, and a leader in developing the first classroom courses for Chamorro. She guided multiple generations of Chamorro-language instructors. She was also the author of the “Inifresi,” the Guam pledge, which is recited each day by tens of thousands of Guam public-school children (*GDP*, 24 Feb 2016).

In November 2014, Governor Calvo launched his “Imagine Guam” initiative, meant to be an extended community-wide conversation on what Guam could be in 2065 (*PDN*, 10 July 2015). The Speaker of the Guam Legislature, Judith Won Pat, had told the Governor’s Office in July 2015 that its initial vision was too focused on the economic elite and did not have enough representation from cultural, educational, and health sectors (*PDN*, 17 July 2015). The Governor’s Office expanded the roster of participants to more than a hundred, divided into seventeen discussion teams.

Over the course of three conventions, the Imagine Guam attendees focused on elaborating the possibilities for Guam in land, capital improvements, tax-code revision, government,

society, workforce, career paths, and education. The discussions were hampered in many ways, however, due to the island’s political status and uncertainty over whether self-determination could be possible. In a January 2016 speech, the governor highlighted the need for a decolonized outlook when looking to the future: “Imagine Guam is—at its heart—self-determination. We are determining the course we will take. We do so because of our love of Guam and the confidence that is growing that we can take control. And why should we be so confident in this modern era, when we’ve spent so much time believing we were inferior in this vast world? The rest of our country pushes against the American borders of the Pacific. But we’re at the world’s economic frontier. It’s not simply a magnet for industry, but for the larger, more brilliant, and more attractive fruits of life that breed sustainable futures” (*PDN*, 30 Jan 2016).

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MARSHALL ISLANDS

For the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the period under review saw the passing of several traditional and political leaders and distinguished community members. Most notable was the death of Iroojlaplap (Paramount Chief), Senator, and former President Jurelang Zedkaia, who suffered a fatal heart attack in October 2015. In addition to overseeing landholding across Mājro (Majuro) Atoll as its traditional leader, Zedkaia served in the Nitijeļā (Parliament) for twenty-four years and as the nation's president from 2009 to 2012 after he was elected to replace Litokwa Tomeing, who had been removed from office by a vote of no confidence. Zedkaia was honored with a month of national mourning and a state funeral attended by thousands (*MIJ*, 16 Oct 2015). Several other high-ranking irooj (chiefs) and former members of the Nitijeļā also passed during this period. Among these was Mājro Irooj and former Senator Wilfred Kendall, who died in January 2016 after a long illness. Kendall's political career

spanned several decades and included accomplishments such as being elected repeatedly to the Congress of Micronesia, serving as minister of education under the late President Amata Kabua and subsequent administrations, and acting as the longest-serving RMI ambassador to the United Nations (*MIJ*, 29 Jan 2016).

Other deaths included Kuwajleen Aļap (lineage head) and former Senator Sato Maie, former Arņo Senator Katip Paul Mack, and Rien Morris, who represented Jālwoj in the Nitijeļā for twenty years. The Kōle/Pikinni/Ejit (KBE) community also lost two leaders. Nishma Jamore, KBE mayor and outspoken advocate of relocating the KBE community to the US continent, died of apparent complications from kidney disease in August 2015, while Marilyn Lokebol succumbed to cancer in June 2016, just a few months after her first-time election as KBE councilwoman. Two respected religious leaders also passed away: United Church of Christ (UCC) Pastor Wendell Langrine of Tucson, Arizona, died in August 2015 during a church conference in Mājro, and Jone Masivou, who came to the Marshall Islands from Fiji as an Assembly of God missionary and founded the Morning Star Church in Mājro in 1995, died in April 2016. Other beloved community members who were lost include Neimon Philippo, wife of former Lae Atoll Senator Tipne Philippo; former v7AB radio announcer Waston Attari; Majuro Middle School special education teacher Asmon Langidrik Jr; and Youth to Youth in Health Director Aluka Rakin. Robert Reimer's only daughter Minna Pihno, who managed key aspects of Robert Reimers Enter-

prises, Inc (RRE) for decades, succumbed to cancer in February 2016.

The period under review was also one of unprecedented transformation in the realm of politics and leadership at the national and local levels, with the most dramatic events unfolding around the November 2015 elections. These included the controversial Nitijeļā campaign by former Peace Corps volunteer Jack Niedenthal; the death of Mājro Atoll Nitijeļā incumbent Iroojlaplap Jurelang Zedkaia; the mobilization of the “youth” vote in favor of several younger, first-time senators; the record election of three woman senators as well as several woman mayors and members of local councils; a vote of no confidence just two weeks after the Nitijeļā’s selection of first-time Senator Casten Nemra of Jālwōj as president; and the subsequent election of Senator Hilda Heine of Aur as the first woman head of state in the RMI or any independent Pacific Island nation (not including New Zealand and Australia). While the election results have inspired some Marshall Islanders to anticipate positive changes for their communities and for their country as a whole, many continue to experience the negative effects of extreme poverty, limited access to health care and other essential services, a floundering education system, extreme weather events, and financial mismanagement at the local and national levels. It remains to be seen whether the new administration and the Constitutional Convention scheduled to take place in late 2016 will bring about the desired changes.

The 2015 election season went into full swing in October 2015 when the attorney general’s office

dropped its appeal of a high court ruling that allowed naturalized citizen Jack Niedenthal to stand for election to the Nitijeļā. In late 2014, the RMI Electoral Administration barred Niedenthal from running for office on the grounds that he does not have a Marshallese parent or a traditional jowi (matriclan). When Attorney General Nathan Brechtefeld upheld the decision, Niedenthal and his attorney, David Strauss, brought the matter to the high court, arguing that the RMI Constitution authorizes any qualified voter over the age of twenty-one to run for office. In February 2015, the high court ruled on behalf of Niedenthal, declaring null and void the section of the Marshall Islands Elections and Referenda Act 1980 that prescribed eligibility qualifications for candidates beyond age and citizenship. The attorney general’s office moved to appeal the decision in the RMI Supreme Court but dropped the request after Assistant Attorney General Rosalie Konou retired in September 2015, allowing the high court’s decision in favor of Niedenthal to stand and his campaign to move forward. The issue of eligibility requirements for election to public office will be addressed at the impending Constitutional Convention; in April 2016, Mile Senator and Minister of Education Wilbur Heine proposed a bill to amend the constitution so that “any person who is qualified to be a candidate must have land rights by birth and be a natural born citizen” (*MIJ*, 22 April 2016).

The run-up to the election took another dramatic turn when, just weeks before Election Day, Iroojlaplap and incumbent Senator Jurelang

Zedkaia of Mājro died suddenly. As Zedkaia had served in the Nitijeļā for more than two decades and was almost assured reelection, his death opened the Mājro electoral field significantly. When all the votes were counted, the results in Mājro and around the nation were extraordinary, with fourteen out of thirty-three Nitijeļā seats changing hands. Incumbents who lost their seats included Speaker of the Nitijeļā Donald Capelle of Likiep, Vice Speaker Caios Lucky of Ujae, and five cabinet ministers including Minister of Foreign Affairs Tony deBrum of Kuwajleen, Minister of Health Phillip Muller of Mājro, Minister of Resources and Development Michael Konelios of Maļoelap, Minister of Justice Rien Morris of Jālwōj, and Minister of Public Works Hiroshi Yamamura of Utrōk. Incumbents Jiba Kabua of Arņo and Jeban Riklon of Kuwajleen were also defeated. Mājro Senator David Kramer, who held on to his seat, cited the losses as evidence that the people of the Marshall Islands “want change and new directions for the RMI” (*MIJ*, 27 Nov 2015).

The desire for a new direction for the Marshall Islands was further substantiated by the impressive lineup of newly elected senators, several of whom campaigned on a “voice of youth” platform promising fresh leadership and positive change for the future (*MIJ*, 27 Nov 2015). Victors in the “youth” camp included Sherwood Tibon and Kalani Kaneko of Mājro, David Paul of Kuwajleen, Bruce Bili-mon of Maļoelap, and Casten Nemra of Jālwōj. Of particular note were first-time candidates Sherwood Tibon and Kalani Kaneko, who came in first and fifth, respectively, in the race

for Mājro’s five Nitijeļā seats and whose victories signaled not just voter discontent but also a youthful shift in voter demographics. In Kuwajleen, David Paul’s victory coincided with the defeat of Tony deBrum, a career politician and prominent international activist. DeBrum’s efforts over the past several years to bring international attention to the negative impacts of climate change and nuclear proliferation on small island nations such as the Marshall Islands left some constituents on Ebjā (Ebeye) Island and other parts of Kuwajleen Atoll wondering how his efforts on the global stage have benefited them at home. Over the past year alone, Ebjā residents grappled with high rates of poverty, inadequate housing, insufficient educational opportunities, severe flooding, power outages, and other challenges (*MIJ*, 27 Nov 2015).

The “youth” victory was not the only surprising outcome of the 2015 election; an unprecedented number of women also took office at the national and local levels. Significantly, three women gained seats in the Nitijeļā, the most to ever hold office at one time—with incumbent Hilda Heine retaining her seat, Daisy Alik-Momotaro of Jālwōj defeating incumbent Rien Morris, and former Senator Amenta Matthew of Utrōk regaining her seat after losing it to Hiroshi Yamamura in 2011. Several women also won mayoral seats; among these were Rufina Jack of Aelok, incumbent Ione deBrum of Epoon, and Veronica Wase of Likiep. In addition, several communities elected women to serve as representatives on their local councils; among these were Betty Tibon-Imaikta of Mājro, Stacey Samuel of Mājro,

and Marilyn Lokebol of KBE. Other historic results included the election of the Nitijeļā's first-ever mother-and-son pair Amenta Matthew and Sherwood Tibon, husband and wife Dennis Momotaro of Mājeļ and Daisy Alik-Momotaro, and three members of the Heine family: Hilda Heine, Wilbur Heine of Mile, and Thomas Heine of Lae. The Heine family and the "youth" coalition would prove fateful for the next series of shake-ups to rock national governance at the highest level.

Because the RMI has a mixed parliamentary-presidential system, the president of the Marshall Islands is elected by the Nitijeļā rather than directly by voters. The election of a new executive was therefore the first and most important task of the Nitijeļā after being sworn in on 4 January 2016. With no well-defined or permanent political parties in the Marshall Islands, the selection of president is usually tied to members' allegiance to particular senators or their island(s) of origin or chiefly status. By the time of the swearing in, three coalitions had emerged among the newly elected senators: one known simply as the "current government" alliance, a conglomeration of largely defunct political parties led by Irooj and Kuwajleen Senator Michael Kabua and incumbent President and Aelōñļapļap Senator Christopher Loeak; the KEA (Kien Eo Aṃ or "Your Government") party led by Alvin Jacklick, who was previously a senator for Jālwōj but was elected this term from Kuwajleen; and a new coalition known initially as the "Solid Six" made up of newly elected "youth" Senators Alfred Alfred Jr of

Aelōñļapļap, Jejwarick Anton of Arṃo, Bruce Bilimon, Casten Nemra, David Paul, and Sherwood Tibon. After gaining a few additional members after the election, the Solid Six became known simply as the "Solids."

With seventeen votes needed and no one coalition boasting a sufficient number of adherents, a joint coalition was required to garner enough votes to elect a president. Knowing this, several senators initiated a series of coalition-building meetings in early December; by Christmas, the KEA's Alvin Jacklick announced that a "Coalition Government" had been created aligning the KEA and the Solids with enough votes to elect a president; the coalition came to be known as the "opposition coalition" because members were united primarily in their goal of opposing incumbent President Christopher Loeak and his administration and allies (*MIJ*, 25 Dec 2015). Potential opposition coalition nominees for the presidency included Alvin Jacklick (KEA), David Kramer (KEA), Tony Muller of Mājro (KEA), former President Litokwa Tomeing of Mājro (KEA), Casten Nemra (Solids), and Kessai Note (unaffiliated). Jacklick confirmed that the opposition coalition's presidential pick would allocate cabinet appointments evenly, with five going to members of the KEA and five to the Solids; in addition, the Speaker of the Nitijeļā would come from the KEA and the vice speaker from the Solids. Faced with this opposition coalition, the current government had to gain the allegiance of members of the KEA or the Solids to maintain any possibility of holding on to the presidency. Hoping to return the current government to power

despite the odds, Senator Michael Kabua quickly sought allies to join him in nominating a president. Possible current government contenders included Hilda Heine, David Kabua, and incumbent President Christopher Loeak. Given the numbers amassed by the KEA/Solids coalition, however, it seemed unlikely going into the election that the current government would prevail. But there were more surprises to come.

At the first meeting of the Nitijeļā on 4 January, Senator Michael Kabua stunned everyone by choosing Casten Nemra of the opposition coalition as the current government's nominee for president. Nemra had been considered for nomination by the opposition in a primary ten days earlier but had lost out to Alvin Jacklick. By choosing a candidate who would draw support from the Solids and later owe allegiance to the current government for putting him in power, Kabua had bested the opposition. In the end, Nemra prevailed: he narrowly defeated Jacklick by a vote of 17 to 16. Meanwhile, the opposition successfully nominated Kenneth Kedi of Roņļap as Speaker and Jejwarick Anton as vice speaker of the Nitijeļā; their successful election (both won 19 to 14) brought another first to the Nitijeļā: the first time the president and Speaker and vice speaker were from two different coalitions. President Nemra quickly found himself in a tenuous position: not only did he not have the full support of his Speaker and vice speaker, but he would also find it difficult to select a cabinet agreeable to both sides. Within just a week of Nemra's election to the nation's highest office, rumors were

circulating about a possible vote of no confidence (*MIJ*, 15 Jan 2016).

A week after the election, Casten Nemra was inaugurated as the seventh president of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The first-time senator and former chief secretary (2008–2015) was the youngest person and only the second non-irooj ever elected to the presidency (Kessai Note was the first). Prior to the inauguration, Nemra faced the challenge of naming his cabinet ministers; caught between the opposition coalition of which he had been a member and the current government coalition that had brought him to power, Nemra found it difficult to select a lineup acceptable to both sides. The result was a partial cabinet list with a few picks from each faction and several conspicuous omissions: not only were the minister of education and minister of health posts left vacant, but Hilda Heine, Wilbur Heine, and Thomas Heine—who had all served as ministers during Christopher Loeak's administration and had presumably supported Nemra's election—were not named on the cabinet list. The omission of Hilda Heine, whom many regard as uniquely qualified as minister of education because she has a doctorate in education and served as minister of education under President Loeak, was particularly unexpected. Apparently, however, Hilda Heine and Wilbur Heine refused their nominations because their cousin and incumbent Minister of Justice Thomas Heine was not nominated for a cabinet post; President Nemra instead named Ujae Senator and former Attorney General Atbi Riklon to the minister of justice post. In response, all three Heine senators

boycotted President Nemra's inauguration ceremony and were soon after reported to be in conversation with the opposition coalition; meanwhile, several KEA/Solids followers turned down cabinet appointments and asked the president to form a cabinet of "national unity" representing all three coalitions (*MIJ*, 15 Jan 2016). Nemra's rejection of the suggestion, the defection of the Heine contingent to the opposition, and the 22 January resignation of Mike Halferty of Arŋo from his post as minister of transportation and communication after only eleven days all signaled that a vote of no confidence was looming.

Three days after Senator Halferty vacated his ministerial post and just fourteen days after President Nemra's election, Senator John Silk of Epoon introduced a vote of no confidence on the grounds that neither President Nemra nor his government had a mandate from the Nitijelā or from the people of the Marshall Islands; what's more, the president did not have a fully functioning cabinet and thus could not move the government or the nation forward. Although the motion was strongly opposed by several senators—including President Nemra, Michael Kabua, and former President Kessai Note—on the grounds that the new president had not had sufficient time to form alliances or put forth a strong agenda, the opposition called for the body to reconvene the next day for a vote. Following a short twenty-four-hour recess and a call to vote, President Casten Nemra was removed from office by a successful vote of no confidence (21 to 12)—the second successful vote out of eight such motions since 1998—making

Nemra not just the youngest but also the shortest-serving president in the history of the RMI.

Although section 7 of the RMI Constitution allows the Nitijelā fourteen days to elect a new president following a successful vote of no confidence, Senator David Kramer made a motion for the election to take place the next day, 27 January, and the motion passed. Soon after dispersing for the day, the opposition coalition met to decide on a nominee to replace Nemra. On 27 January 2016, the opposition coalition, including members of the KEA, the Solids, and several current government defectors, nominated Hilda Heine as the next president of the Republic of the Marshall Islands; a vote was called and Dr Heine won with 24 of 30 total votes. Six senators abstained; three of these, including current government leaders Irooj Senator Michael Kabua and Irooj Senator Christopher Loeak, were noticeably absent.

Hilda Heine's election as the eighth president of the Republic of the Marshall Islands was historic in several ways, not the least of which is that she is the first woman president of the Marshall Islands or any independent Pacific Island nation. President Heine was inaugurated on 28 January 2016, just one day after her election, and named her cabinet ministers within a few days. Although the Speaker and vice speaker of the Nitijelā remained in place, President Heine's cabinet lineup differed significantly from that of her immediate predecessor; in fact, the only returning minister was Senator Mike Halferty, who had resigned his post under President Nemra after eleven days, in what was perhaps a

strategic move on his part to retain the post under the next administration. Other appointments included Senator John Silk as minister of foreign affairs; President Heine's cousins Wilbur and Thomas as ministers of education and justice, respectively; and members of the original "Solid Six," including Alfred Alfred Jr as minister of resources and development and Kalani Kaneko as minister of health. David Paul, also an original Solid Sixer, was President Heine's initial pick for minister of finance; Senator Paul declined the post, however, on the grounds that he wanted to focus on "get[ting] things going at Kwajalein, to improve Ebeye," which was what he said he was primarily elected to do (*MIJ*, 5 Feb 2016). In Senator Paul's stead, President Heine appointed Senator Brenson Wase of Mājro, who previously held the minister of finance post under President Kessai Note. Neither Senator Daisy Alik-Momotaro (who defected from the opposition to the current government and was appointed minister of internal affairs under President Nemra) nor her husband Senator Dennis Momotaro, (who previously served as Minister of Transportation and Communication and Minister of Finance) received a cabinet appointment.

As of this writing, it remains to be seen whether President Heine and the new administration will succeed in addressing the many challenges their local and national constituents face on a daily basis. Some of the most significant troubles that arose during the period under review include a series of weather-related events that had dramatic local and national consequences: Typhoon Nangka, which

swept through Ānewetak Atoll and other areas in early July 2015, causing widespread damage totaling \$9.4 million and food and water shortages that lasted several months in some areas (*MIJ*, 27 Nov 2015); a severe drought caused by the El Niño Southern Oscillation that brought Mājro water reserves to a two-year low (*MIJ*, 20 May 2016) and led US President Barack Obama to issue a Presidential Disaster Declaration to make "federal funding available for U.S. Government emergency relief and reconstruction assistance" (The White House 2016); extensive damage caused by king tides and storm surges on Mājro, Kōle, Ebjā, and other areas in October 2015 and March 2016; and impending sea-level rise and loss of land area due to climate change and global warming. Other continuing challenges include the lingering legacies of nuclear testing: the reported deterioration of Runit Dome on Ānewetak Atoll, which contains approximately 111,000 cubic yards of radioactive debris (Jose, Wall, and Hinzl 2015); the RMI's ongoing lawsuits against several nuclear-armed states; and a KBE resolution to seek US government legislation that would allow the people of Bikinni to use money from the Resettlement Trust Fund for the People of Bikini to relocate to the United States.

In an effort to chart a new course and find solutions to these and other challenges threatening the future of the RMI, the Nitijeļā unanimously adopted Bill 70 in September 2015 requiring that a Constitutional Convention (Con-Con) be held. In May 2016, the Pre-Constitutional Convention Committee informed Presi-

dent Heine that an election to select representatives to the Con-Con will take place on 11 October 2016, and the convention will commence within sixty days of the election. The Con-Con will have a total of 45 members: 33 elected from Nitijeļā districts and 12 irooj selected by consensus to represent the various island groups. Many Marshall Islanders are looking to the Con-Con to resolve a number of structural matters they believe are negatively impacting their lives and livelihoods; as the 2015 election cycle revealed, the procedure for electing the country's chief executive and the rules for who can represent them in public office are perhaps among the most pressing. Depending on the convention's outcome, 2015 may have been the first and last election in which a naturalized citizen without land rights by birth could run for the Nitijeļā and the last time Marshall Islanders were denied the right to vote directly for president.

Widespread support for the impending Con-Con is just one more indication that the people of the Marshall Islands want change and new directions for their nation. It also reveals that, as Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa so aptly noted, Marshall Islanders do not just "live day to day, not really caring for the long-term benefits" and outcomes of their actions and decisions, but rather "plan for generations, for the continuity and improvement of their families and kin groups" (Hau'ofa 1994, 159). In the coming months, they can only hope that their elected and traditional leaders will do the same.

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REPUBLIC OF PALAU

The period under review was one that brought about landmark policies and historic moments for the Republic of Palau and for its leadership, including issues related to infrastructure development, climate change, and the ocean. The year brought together both elected and traditional leaders to address issues regarding the welfare of the people. It was also a time of transition as important leaders who had contributed greatly to the country's national development passed on and others stepped into the political scene to lead as Palau contin-

ued to advance its goals of national development.

The Republic of Palau made an ambitious attempt to further conserve its marine resources through legislation by declaring its waters a national marine sanctuary and closing 80 percent of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to commercial fishing. Legislation was first introduced in the Senate of the Ninth Olbiil Era Kelulau (OEK) by the Honorable Senator Hokkons Baules on 7 March 2013, which precipitated President Tommy Remengesau Jr's declaration of the Palau National Marine Sanctuary at the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. The legislation remained in the Senate until 2015, while the president continuously advocated for its passage by rallying the leadership of Palau behind his vision. On 15 October 2015, the Senate passed the bill on its third and final reading and sent it to the House of Delegates of the OEK for consideration.

As the biggest initiative for President Remengesau's third administration moved through the legislative process, Palau's leadership welcomed assistance from the Pew Charitable Trusts to help with the marine sanctuary campaign. Local community support was part of the campaign, and even the rural villages of Palau participated in the national debate. The additional pressure from local people gained even greater momentum when community members, women's organizations, and students graced the Palau National Congress wearing "BUL" T-shirts ("bul" is Palauan for moratorium, which is a Palauan traditional conservation method that allows a

diminishing resource time to replenish itself) and holding signs promoting the marine sanctuary during Remengesau's State of the Republic Address in April 2015. Action on the bill was not taken immediately thereafter, but the growing awareness and concern on the part of the community could not be ignored and became the basis of many discussions in leadership meetings.

Procedurally, the bill was originally assigned to the Senate Committee on Resource, Commerce, Trade, and Development, chaired by the Honorable Senator Mason Whipps. The committee reported the bill to the Senate floor and recommended its passage (Senase 2015c), but the report was not adopted and was instead moved to the Senate Committee on Maritime, Environment, and Protected Areas, chaired by the Honorable Senator Mlib Tmetuchl. Before the latter committee took any action on the bill, however, the report from the original committee was recalled to the floor and adopted, which enabled progress leading ultimately to the bill's passage. Deemed by some to be a controversial measure, the marine sanctuary bill attempted to address some major issues, including environmental conservation and preservation, through a proposed increase in Palau's environmental impact fee as well as the establishment of a visa requirement for noncitizens who hold passports from countries other than the United States, Federated States of Micronesia, or Republic of the Marshall Islands. These two steps would help alleviate some of the economic loss that would be felt as the fishing revenues began to decline as a result of the law (Senase 2015a).

While it was being deliberated in the OEK, the Palau National Marine Sanctuary bill received growing support regionally and internationally despite the delays for its consideration in the Senate (*Island Times* 2015b). Neighboring Pacific Island countries including Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru endorsed the marine sanctuary initiative, and the presidents of neighboring Federated States of Micronesia and Republic of the Marshall Islands joined with Palau in calling on the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA)—a subregional fisheries arrangement that controls a sizable portion of the lucrative tuna fishery in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean—to support the initiative. Internationally, Palau’s marine sanctuary initiative was supported and endorsed by prominent environmental groups such as the Ocean Elders, whose membership includes Prince Albert of Monaco, National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Sylvia Earle, and Ted Turner of CNN (*Senase* 2015c). Two years and seven months after its first reading in the Senate, the Palau National Marine Sanctuary Act became law when President Remengesau signed the legislation on 28 October 2015 as RPPL 9-49. In his letter to the OEK leadership following his signing, the president said, “This open and energetic process has been a true test of our nation’s ability to confront the issues of our time through active participation at every level” (Office of the President 2015).

Around the same time that the marine sanctuary act became law, the OEK established the Belau Submarine Cable Corporation (BSCC) as a step toward the solution to Palau’s tele-

communications concerns, including the slow speed of Internet and limited connectivity throughout some parts of the republic. The creation of a corporation to act as the implementation agency for the project was a condition for an Asian Development Bank (ADB) loan, which would be used to procure the fiber optic cable to connect Palau to the Southeast Asia–United States (SEA-US) cable system and facilitate high-speed Internet access for Palau (*Island Times* 2015a).

As with the Palau National Marine Sanctuary Act, the bill to create the Belau Submarine Cable Corporation met resistance in the Senate. Some senators expressed the view that, rather than create another corporation, the existing Palau National Communications Corporation (PNCC) was a sufficient public corporation to take on the responsibilities set out in the bill. These differences caused significant divergence between the House and Senate versions of the bill (*Island Times* 2015b). The House rejected the Senate version, which led to the creation of a conference committee to further deliberate on the bill and see where compromise could be made to allow for the bill to be passed. The ADB made clear that its loan was contingent on the creation of a separate corporation because of PNCC’s debt, estimated to be about US\$30 million. After extensive discussions and negotiations ultimately including the agreement to create the BSCC, the bill was amended further into a version that was amenable to the Senate, the House, and the ADB.

In his 21 September 2015 signing statement for the Belau Submarine Cable Corporation Act (RPPL 9-47),

President Remengesau reiterated the importance of the legislation by saying, “Fiber optic connectivity will open the doors to opportunities such as e-Health, e-Education, and an improved offering for tourists visiting Palau” (Senase 2015d). He also reminded Palauans that the act was only a first step and that the project would require the cooperation of the different branches of the Palau national government. Shortly thereafter, the Senate introduced a joint resolution to approve, authorize, and ratify the authority of the president to secure a loan from the ADB to ensure Palau’s participation in the SEA-US cable system (Senase 2015f).

The year 2015 was also a significant transitional one for the Republic of Palau because of the passing of a female icon in Palauan society: the Honorable Kathy Kesolei, an OEK senator. The nation felt the weight of the terrible loss, as Senator Kesolei, who was serving as the Senate’s vice president at the time and was one of the most respected women leaders in the republic, passed away on 13 October 2015 in Manila, Philippines, due to health problems (Senase 2015b). Senator Kesolei had also served as Senate vice president in the Eighth OEK, and her stellar leadership both in the Eighth and Ninth Olbiil Era Kelulau ably ensured that Palauan culture was given due regard during deliberations on many pieces of legislation. Kesolei was an anthropologist and an educator earlier in her career, and she dedicated over thirty years of her life to public service, serving on many boards, authorities, and commissions (Senase 2015b). One of her greatest legacies was her effort to uphold and

protect traditional knowledge and Palauan culture amid changing times.

The seat left vacant by Senator Kesolei’s passing was to be filled for the remainder of the term, pursuant to Palau laws. Accordingly, the Senate adopted a resolution acknowledging the vacancy and calling for a special election to occur within thirty to sixty days of adoption of the resolution. Interestingly, in the special election that was held on 22 December 2015, only two of the six candidates were men. Those on the ballot were former Senate President Seit Andres, former Vice President Sandra S Pierantozzi, former Senator Regina Mesebeluu, former Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs Faustina Rehuher-Marugg, Mr Jeff Ngirarsaol, and Ms Margie Borja Dalton. This was the first time that female candidates had outnumbered male candidates in a special election in Palau (Senase 2015e). Seasoned politician Pierantozzi won the special election.

As campaigns were slowly getting into full swing in Palau at the end of 2015, other events of importance were also taking place. In December 2015, the world came together in a great show of unity to combat the worldwide threat of climate change by adopting the Paris Agreement. In a House Joint Resolution, the OEK adopted the agreement, thus allowing Palau to submit its instrument of ratification and become a party to the agreement (Reklai 2016), the second country in the world to do so. The ratification of the agreement occurred in February 2016, when the 21st Micronesian Chief Executives Summit meeting was being held in Palau. As evidence of the clear and present

danger posed by climate change, at the very time of Palau's ratification, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands had already declared states of emergency because of the El Niño effect challenging the two countries. In his statement during the summit, President Remengesau reminded people, "Yet while we can take heart from the fact that we are finally beginning to respond to the impacts of climate change at the global, regional and national level, we here in Micronesia are once again faced with a very real impact of climate change, a severe weather condition known as El Niño." In addition, Remengesau noted, "In Palau, we are experiencing forest fires, the browning of our beautiful Rock Islands and dangerously low water levels in our reservoir" (Carreon 2016). Climate change poses a real threat to the islands as Palau along with its Micronesian neighbors were also feeling the effects of low rainfall (Villanueva-Dizon 2016).

On 22 March 2016, in response to El Niño effects in Palau, the president declared a state of emergency, stipulated in Executive Order 389. The order cited reports from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency's forecasting as well as recent water rationing efforts as the country was experiencing its lowest recorded amount of rainfall since 1954. Water levels were rapidly decreasing, and many feared that water rationing would be an insufficient measure (Remengesau 2016). The OEK, by the power vested in it through the Palau Constitution, immediately confirmed the state of emergency, giving the president emergency powers for a period

of ten days. As stated in the constitution (article VIII, section 14), "The President shall not exercise emergency powers for a period of more than ten (10) days without express and continuing consent of the Olbiil Era Kelulau." Accordingly, President Remengesau asked for an extension at the end of the first ten days, and that request was confirmed again by the OEK. Drought conditions had not improved at the end of the first extension, so the president sought a second extension of ten days for the state of emergency. That would have meant a total of thirty days of emergency powers granted to the president. The request for a second extension was not supported by enough members of the Senate; therefore the resolution was not adopted. The rejection became the basis of further discussions among the leadership of the republic that raised many important issues, including the constitutionality of the actions that were taken.

Amid all of this, President Remengesau delivered his fourth State of the Republic Address. The drought situation was a key element in his speech, in which he praised the resilience of the Palauan people and reminded Palauans of the emergency situations that Palau had experienced and overcome in the past. He listed some of the accomplishments of his administration, with due regard to the passage of the Palau National Marine Sanctuary Act and the developments thereafter. The president also took the opportunity to name some critical achievements of the joint collaboration between the different branches of government that allowed for progress on the improvement of telecommu-

nications and an increase in social security benefits, among other matters. But the state of emergency still took center stage in his address as he awaited the confirmation of the OEK for a second extension of the state of emergency.

After the Senate's rejection of the president's second request for an extension of the state of emergency, the divergence in views about it led to the convening of a national leadership meeting inclusive of both traditional and elected leaders. At the meeting, the National Emergency Committee, which is the coordinating body for emergency and disaster preparedness and response that works closely with the National Emergency Management Office, was able to present its report supporting the president's request for an extension. Remengesau also expressed his concerns, citing the ease of seeking assistance from international partners and allies if Palau was still in a state of emergency. Newly elected Senator Pierantozzi, a veteran of the political scene, said that the drought situation was already being addressed by the measures that were put in place to ensure that people were receiving the water they needed and that those services were not going to be cut off if an extension of the state of emergency was not approved. Those sentiments were further expressed in a letter to the Senate president from senators opposing the second extension. The senators also said that it was a difficult decision on their part as they understood that the people were experiencing hardships as a result of the drought, but they believed their actions were taken pursuant to their responsibility to

uphold the Constitution of the Republic of Palau (*Marianas Variety* 2016b).

Efforts and actions that were taken to address the issue of the drought sought to meet the needs not only of the people but also of the tourism industry, to ensure that the country's main economic driver did not suffer too harshly from the drought (*Marianas Variety* 2016a). The Palau Visitors Authority reported that there was a decline in tourism in early 2016 due in part to the drought. Tourism is the biggest industry in Palau and will become even more significant with the partial closure of the Palau EEZ and the projected decline in fishing revenues.

As Palau was still experiencing the drought, President Remengesau made a decision to travel to New York to attend the High-Level Signing Ceremony of the Paris Agreement in April. In his statement, Remengesau explained, "It was difficult for me to leave my country in a time of crisis, but I felt it was important for me to be here to make this appeal to the international community. For small, vulnerable countries, climate change is already pushing us to the brink. We cannot wait until 2020 for implementation. There are many affordable solutions that continue to go unused, while dangerous impacts happen as we speak." He also stressed that the people of Palau have "shown incredible patience during this crisis, despite their frustration." The president took the opportunity to underscore the urgent need for international assistance while also recognizing the generosity of international allies like Japan and Taiwan that had provided emergency relief (Remengesau 2016).

During the period under review, state governments also witnessed the greater involvement of women in elected positions. In December 2015, Ilolang Sisca R Vogt became governor of Ngeremlengui State, and Huana Nestor won the gubernatorial seat that had been left vacant on the resignation of former Hatohobei State Governor Thomas Patris. Governor Nestor also secured the same seat in the following general election for Hatohobei State, in which a woman lieutenant governor and three female legislators were also elected. Those women joined other female elected officials from the various states and contributed to the growing female representation in national and state elected leadership roles.

The region celebrated the Twelfth Festival of Pacific Arts (FestPac) in Guam from 22 May to 4 June 2016. To distinguish Palau's participation in this festival, several members of the Palauan delegation journeyed to Guam from Palau in an epic voyage aboard the sailing vessel *Alingano Maisu*. The *Alingano Maisu* sailed using traditional instrument-free navigational methods under the leadership of master navigator Sesario Sewalur. The double-hulled voyaging canoe arrived in Guam in time for the festivities, but unfortunately the end of the trip was marred by tragedy. Murais Sebangiol, a FestPac delegate from Melekeok who had studied traditional seafaring methods, passed away shortly after the canoe reached Guam (Guzman 2016). Despite the untimely passing of one of Palau's sons, the republic, represented by many artists, dancers, and singers as well as traditional and elected leaders, still showcased stellar

performances throughout the duration of the festival, depicting the unity of the people of Palau.

With the national primary elections just around the corner on 27 September 2016, many citizens have filed petitions to hold elected office in Palau. As of press time, President Remengesau had yet to officially file for reelection but had already begun actively campaigning. Also vying for the top office are Senator Pierantozzi, two-term Senator Surangel Whipps Jr, and incumbent Vice President Antonio Bells. Joining these prospective candidates in the primary elections are three hopefuls for the vice presidency: former Senate President and current Senator Mlib Tmetuchl, Senate Floor Leader Raynold B Oilouch, and Koror State Governor Yositaka Adachi. There are many other hopefuls for the other seats in the OEK in both the Senate and the House of Delegates, and it is anticipated that many more will enter these races before the filing deadline of 3 August 2016.

As elections near, 2016 promises to continue to be a significant year for the Republic of Palau. Furthermore, this is the first year of implementation following the September 2015 adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Sustainable Development Goals, which replaced the Millennium Development Goals (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015), and national efforts are being coordinated to ensure that the Palauan people are working diligently to do their part in achieving the targets of each of the seventeen goals. There are still many issues that must be addressed, but Palauans understand that through civic engagement

and democratic discourse, Palau will continue to tackle the issues and seek solutions, just as it has always done.

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THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED *in this review are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the government of the Republic of Palau.*

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