

Opening Remarks to the US Coral Reef Task Force
H.E. Redley Killion, Vice President of the Federated States of Micronesia
November 5, 2005

Hon. President Tommy Remengesau, Hon. Co-chairs Timothy Keeney and David Smith, Hon. Governor Felix P. Camacho, Hon. Governor Togiola Tulafono, Hon. Minister Witten T. Philippo and other distinguished delegates. It is with great pleasure that I stand here today representing the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia. H.E. Joseph Urusemal, President of the Federated States of Micronesia, wanted to be here but had conflicting commitments to at the South Pacific Forum meeting in Papua New Guinea.

The Federated States of Micronesia is a small, independent island developing state, which enjoys a special relationship with the United States through the Compact of Free Association, which was recently amended and renewed in 2004. Taking into account our 200 mile EEZ, the FSM's total jurisdictional area is larger than the continental US, encompassing over 1 million square miles of ocean! Our 108,000 citizens, representing nine ethnic Micronesian and Polynesian groups, live on 671 islands that vary geologically from high mountainous islands of Pohnpei, Chuuk and Kosrae to low, coral atolls. Although our oceans are extensive, together our land area adds up to just 271 square miles (or about 4 times the size of Washington, DC).

As a nation of far flung and isolated islands and great physical and cultural diversity, nation-building has been a major challenge for the FSM in the 19 years since independence. Our nation faces a unique set of opportunities and challenges. Geographical isolation and a poorly developed infrastructure remain major impediments to long-term growth. Present concerns include large-scale unemployment and overdependence on outside aid. Many of our forests and reefs are currently threatened by overharvesting, development activities, and/or invasive species. Addressing these threats depends on increasing awareness and action by our citizens who are dependent on these resources. Economic activity consists primarily of subsistence farming and fishing. The potential for a tourist industry exists, but the remote location, a lack of adequate facilities, and limited air connections hinder development. The Amended Compact of Free Association with the US guarantees the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) millions of dollars in annual aid through 2023, and establishes a Trust Fund into which the US and the FSM make annual contributions in order to provide annual payouts to the FSM in perpetuity after 2023. However, the country's medium-term economic outlook is weak due not only to the reduction in US assistance but also to the slow growth of the private sector.

Our dependence on our natural resources for both subsistence and the development of a commercial economy has made us particularly concerned with the protection of our marine and terrestrial environment. The continued health of our marine environment in particular, which consists of an estimated **3,798 miles**

of coastline, and 5,605 square miles of coral reefs (3,587,229 acres!!!), is of particular concern to our young nation. In recognition of the importance we put on the protection of our environment, the FSM has joined the nations of the world and acceded to a number of important international agreements and conventions, including Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, and Ozone Layer Protection.

With the completion of the Federated States of Micronesia's (FSM) National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (NBSAP) as part of our commitments under the Convention on Biodiversity, the nation is poised to move forward aggressively on our conservation priorities. The vision for the nation's future expressed in the FSM NBSAP states:

The FSM will have more extensive, diverse, and higher quality of marine, aquatic, and terrestrial ecosystems, which meet human needs and aspirations fairly, preserve and utilize traditional knowledge and practices, and fulfill the ecosystem functions necessary for all life on Earth.

Under the major theme of ecosystem management, the NBSAP sets a clear protected areas objective:

"a full representation of the FSM's marine, freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystems are protected, conserved, and sustainably managed, including selected areas designated for total protection".

To move forward on the development of a national protected area network, the State and National governments of the FSM have recently signed a National Implementation Support Partnership (NISP) agreement with The Nature Conservancy and several local non-government organizations, pledging to collaborate and support the implementation of the Programme of Work (PoW) on Protected Areas that was adopted at the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2004. Under the agreement we will move forward to:

1. Hold nationwide stakeholder consultations with governments, NGOs, and community partners;
2. Identify needed policy, legislative and institutional reform to support a national protected areas network;
3. Develop national standards and criteria for protected area planning and management;
4. Conduct a national gap assessment;
5. Support scientific research on biodiversity values, resilience and connectivity;

6. Assess government, NGO, and community capacity to develop and manage a national protected areas network;
7. Provide institutional and conservation planning capacity building assistance through training and internships;
8. Develop a sustainable financing plan, including higher levels of overall funding and more reliable funding over time.

I wish to take this opportunity to first thank you for your strong support to date in encouraging the FSM to participate in meetings of the U. S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) and its Steering Committee. In addition, I would like to thank the agencies represented on the task force for your generous assistance to our government and non-profit organizations to date. We look forward to working closely with you and the USCRTF towards our shared goal of maintaining the pristine condition of our coral reef environment upon which the people of the FSM depend and enjoy as a source of food, recreation, and economic activities. On behalf of our nation, I would also like to ask the task force to consider holding a future task force meeting in the FSM so that we can share with you all first hand some of the challenges and the exciting work being undertaken to establish the FSM as a world leader in coral reef conservation. Thank you...