



Fact Sheet (Revised)  
Office of the Spokesman  
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## U.S. Engagement in the Pacific Islands Region: 2007 Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders and Core Partners Meeting

The Eighth Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders, held at the Department of State May 7, is part of U.S. efforts to expand engagement with the vast and important Pacific region through closer political, economic, and cultural ties.

The triennial Conference of Leaders, organized by the Honolulu-based East-West Center, brings together the heads of government and other senior officials from Pacific countries and territories, including Hawaii and the U.S. territories. This year, the Conference is being held in Washington, D.C. for the first time. The gathering marks a milestone in what the U.S. is calling the "Year of the Pacific," a focused effort by the U.S. Government to increase our role in the Pacific region in support of regional stability, good governance, and economic development.

In addition to the meeting with the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Pacific Leaders will hold discussions at the State Department with a wide range of senior officials from the Department of State, Department of Defense, U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, U.S. Department of Commerce (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and International Trade Administration), Coast Guard, Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

On May 8 and 9, the Department of State will also host a Core Partners Meeting for countries and organizations with a strong interest in the Pacific to discuss regional issues and improve policy coordination. Senior officials from Australia, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, as well as representatives from the East-West Center, the European Union, the Pacific Islands Forum, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and the United Nations will endorse a set of principles calling for transparency, responsibility, and accountability in assistance programs to promote good governance and the rule of law in the region.

The United States is announcing a number of new initiatives as part of its effort to expand political, economic, and cultural ties with the Pacific. Some highlights include:

### Public Diplomacy

- The State Department has established a new regional office in Suva to oversee U.S. public diplomacy activities throughout the Pacific Islands. The office will introduce a broad array of press, culture, and education programs to the region.
- The State Department is increasing educational exchanges in the South Pacific and will continue the South Pacific Scholarship Program that sends five students annually from selected Pacific countries to the U.S. for undergraduate and graduate degrees.
- The State Department will introduce new democracy grants in the region. The program, intended to build capacity in the non-governmental sector, will seek project proposals focused on democratic processes, civil rights and rule of law.
- We will increase Pacific Islands participation in the International Visitor Leadership Program, which brings young leaders to the U.S. for three-weeks of travel and meetings with their American counterparts. The Department's U.S. Speaker Program will also recruit experts in various fields of mutual interest to travel to the region and meet with officials, academics and other professionals.

### Guam Relocation

- The State Department is working with the Department of Defense's Joint Guam Program Office (JGPO) to explore options for neighboring countries to contribute to and benefit from the construction projects related to the relocation of 8,000 U.S. troops from Okinawa to Guam. Citizens of Palau, the Marshall Islands, and Micronesia are currently eligible to work in Guam and other U.S. Territories.

### Trade and Commercial Ties

- In 2006, \$57 million of U.S. imports from the Pacific region received duty-free benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences Program (GSP) program (22 percent of all imports). Between 2005 and 2006, however, another \$2 million in U.S. imports from the Pacific Islands were likely eligible for duty-free entry under GSP, but the exemption was not claimed by importers.
- The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) will provide individualized briefings to Pacific countries on how they can increase the duty-free treatment of their exports to the United States under GSP, which will help expand their economies and create jobs.
- USTR, in cooperation with the Office of Women's Empowerment, will organize workshops in June in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and Suva, Fiji, for government, business leaders, and non-governmental organizations on how to expand their use of GSP duty-free treatment to expand access to the U.S. market. The workshops will be open to participants from throughout the region.
- Under the GSP program, thousands of types of U.S. imports from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are eligible for duty-free treatment. The Compacts of Free Association also provide duty-free entry for U.S. imports from Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau.
- USTR will hold a digital video conference (DVC) with Pacific Island officials to discuss trade and other economic issues.
- The Department of Commerce offered recommendations for actions the Pacific Islands can take to create a welcoming business climate to attract foreign direct investment, and highlighted current capacity building programs available to the Pacific Islands on intellectual property rights.

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