

Press Releases: U.S. Engagement in the Pacific

Fact Sheet
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
September 3, 2018

The United States sees the Pacific Islands as an essential part of the free and open Indo-Pacific region and we are committed to the Pacific Islands' future security and prosperity. As a demonstration of our commitment, the United States – through more than 17 departments and agencies – committed more than \$350 million in FY 2017 to our engagement with the Pacific Islands via projects, assistance, and operations that directly benefit the over 10 million people of the region. The United States partners with the Pacific Islands to tackle global and regional challenges, including promoting regional security and stability, advancing sustainable growth and prosperity, addressing environmental challenges, providing assistance for natural disasters, and strengthening our people-to-people ties.

Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke's participation in the Pacific Islands Forum's (PIF) Forum Dialogue Partners (FDP) meeting, leading an interagency U.S. delegation, reflects sustained United States commitment to the region, our Pacific Island partners and the U.S. territories in the Pacific. The U.S. Department of the Interior is responsible for administering United States assistance to the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau under their respective Compacts of Free Association with the United States.

Securing the Pacific

The United States is a committed security provider and partner with the Pacific Islands. Our partnership dates back to the bloody battles of World War II on the shores of Tarawa, Pelelieu and Guadalcanal, where Pacific Islanders and Americans alike sacrificed for our collective security. Today, the United States is responsible for security and defense matters in and relating to Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands under their respective Compacts of Free Association with the United States. Citizens from these three countries serve in the U.S. military at high rates, and the Marshall Islands hosts a U.S. military garrison on Kwajalein Atoll.

Security Cooperation: U.S. bilateral security cooperation assists Pacific Island nations to better ensure their own security, to contribute to global peacekeeping operations, and to respond to disasters and other crises. Earlier this month, United States Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral Philip Davidson announced the U.S. would provide harbor security assistance in support of APEC Leaders' Week. In August, Secretary Pompeo announced at the ASEAN Regional Forum that the U.S. will provide \$290 million in Foreign Military Financing to strengthen maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and peacekeeping capabilities across the Indo-Pacific region. Today, Secretary Zinke followed up on the announcement by specifying the United States' intention to commit \$7 million in Foreign Military Financing for Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Tonga, which will support training, equipment, and other security cooperation priorities identified with these countries. The United States also provides a combined \$750,000 annually in International Military Exercise and Training (IMET) funding to Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa to support training and capacity building for military and police forces, and the Nevada National Guard conducts exchanges and training with Tonga under the State Partnership Program. To further support capacity building for Pacific defense and law enforcement professionals, the United States is committed to working with the Government of Australia to support the development of their new Australian Pacific Security College.

Maritime Security: Across the Pacific, the United States is a key partner on maritime security through U.S. Coast Guard and the Oceania Maritime Security Initiative (OMSI) shiprider agreements with 10 Pacific Island countries, which allow local law enforcement officers to embark on U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy vessels, in order to observe, protect, board, and search vessels suspected of violating laws or regulations within their Exclusive Economic Zones or on the high seas. The United States and Fiji plan to sign a shiprider agreement shortly, and the United States is also working to finalize agreements with Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. In 2019, the U.S. Coast Guard will hold a five-day training course for Pacific Island shipriders aimed at combatting illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Tonga participated in the 2018 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC 2018) exercise and Fiji has been invited to join the next RIMPAC exercise in 2020. The United States also supports maritime security through participation in the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency's regional surveillance operations, high seas boardings, and inspections and other activities under the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Australia, France, New Zealand, and the United States cooperate as the Quadrilateral Defense Coordination Group to coordinate maritime security efforts in the region, including joint operations.

Maritime Boundaries: As part of our commitment to ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific, where all nations respect the rule of law and sovereignty, the United States is working with our Pacific Island neighbors to resolve outstanding maritime boundaries. We signed a maritime boundary treaty with Kiribati in 2013 and with the Federated States of Micronesia in 2014. These treaties received advice and consent from the U.S. Senate on July 28, 2018 and are now with the President for ratification. The United States has also

successfully concluded negotiations with the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga on a new maritime boundary treaty, and expects to sign the treaty in the near future.

Enforcing UNSC Sanctions: The United States supports efforts by the Pacific Islands to fully implement UN Security Council sanctions on North Korea. To help Pacific Island leaders meet the commitments they made at the PIF in 2017, we are supporting regional capacity building for Pacific shipping registries, in partnership with Australia, New Zealand, and the PIF Secretariat. The first workshop held July 2-3 in Suva, Fiji, focused on performing due diligence to ensure vessels registered or applying for registry do not have any links to the DPRK. It has already led to increased information sharing amongst the Pacific Islands. We will hold a follow-up conference in November to continue to build technical capacity in this area and address key shipping security issues.

Enhancing Law Enforcement Cooperation: We welcome efforts in the region to enhance information sharing on security and law enforcement concerns to combat IUU fishing and tackle transnational crime, including the initiative led by Australia to establish a new information sharing network/fusion center for the region. The Pacific Islands face a multitude of transnational crime threats, including illegal fishing, financial crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, gang activity, and cybercrime. The United States partners with regional bodies and governments in the Pacific Islands region to enhance law enforcement cooperation through a number of mechanisms, including by improving information sharing, providing investigative support, and building capacity through training and mentoring. In 2018, the U.S. Department of State launched a new \$750,000 program with the International Organization for Migration to work in Papua New Guinea to institutionalize victim-centered investigations and prosecutions and to build local capacity to provide comprehensive protection services to survivors of human trafficking. Later this year, the Department of State will also support anti-trafficking in persons training and technical assistance for Fiji's police and public prosecutors.

Economic Development

When the United States invests in the Pacific Islands, we do so as a partner committed to a shared future that advances national sovereignty, regional cooperation, and trust. This occurs when infrastructure is physically secure, socially responsible, and financially viable. To attract much needed private sector capital, Indo-Pacific countries must prioritize transparency, anti-corruption, and responsible financing. At the Indo-Pacific Business Forum in July, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced a number of regional programs in support of these goals, including the Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network.

Supporting Pacific Infrastructure: To further our commitment to the Pacific Islands, today Secretary Zinke announced the United States intends to join the Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility (PRIF) with an initial contribution of \$2 million to support technical assistance on infrastructure investment planning and research into the key infrastructure challenges

facing Pacific Islands. U.S. membership at PRIF will also enable us to better coordinate the over \$350 million in assistance the United States provides to the Pacific Islands annually.

Unlocking the Power of the Private Sector: Government spending alone will not be enough to address the development needs of the Pacific Islands. The United States wants to foster private sector-led growth and unlock the power of the free market for sustainable development in the Pacific. This is why we are investing in efforts to share U.S. expertise with the Pacific Island countries in areas of economic opportunity, such as fisheries and tourism. The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative will travel to Fiji and Papua New Guinea in October to explore how the Pacific Islands can better utilize their market access to the United States under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).

Cooperating on Fisheries: Fisheries are a lifeblood of Pacific Island economies and a cornerstone of U.S.-Pacific cooperation. The United States and 16 Pacific Island parties agreed to adopt amendments to the 1987 Treaty on Fisheries in December 2016, and have been working together on implementation since then. On August 28, the President Trump sent the recent amendments to the Treaty to the U.S. Senate in the next step of the U.S. ratification process. This is the first treaty package sent by this Administration to the Senate, reflecting the importance of our relationship with the Pacific Islands. The Treaty supports millions of dollars in commercial fishing activity, \$21 million in related economic assistance, and broad cooperation between the parties and stakeholders in support of sustainable fisheries and shared interests. We are also investing in efforts to support Pacific Island fisheries businesses. We will support a third round of the Fish 2.0 business competition, which has connected Pacific Island entrepreneurs in sustainable fisheries with training, mentoring, and investors from the United States. This year, Fish 2.0 will partner with the Government of Australia to host training workshops and a regional investor forum, enabling new opportunities for Pacific Island businesses to integrate into regional and global supply chains.

Revitalizing the Tourism Sector: Tourism is another major economic driver and job creator in the Pacific Islands. To better support this vital sector, we are renewing a U.S.-Pacific Islands Tourism Exchange program launched last year by the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the East-West Center, for emerging tourism leaders from the region. The program's goal is to invigorate Pacific island economies by increasing the capacities of mid-level tourism professionals in the private and public sectors and civil society organizations. The first group of participants arrived in Hawaii in the spring of 2018. The participants spend approximately six weeks in the U.S. for individually-tailored fellowship placements with organizations in Hawaii and participate in the Professional Fellows Congress in Washington, D.C. Two subsequent groups of U.S. participants will travel overseas to the Pacific Islands to spend approximately two weeks with their foreign counterparts in their workplaces and communities.

Protecting the Environment

The United States recognizes the importance the Pacific Islands place on the pristine environment of the Blue Pacific region. We partner with the Pacific Islands on a range of activities to ensure that the natural resources of the Pacific are sustainably managed to support generations of future Pacific Islanders. The United States is proud to be a contributing member to the Pacific Community (SPC), the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP), and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), and to support their regional work to protect the environment and manage oceanic and coastal fisheries resources.

Protecting Natural Resources and Combatting Invasive Species: The United States is working with the Pacific Islands to research and combat harmful invasive species in recognition of the toll invasive species take on fragile environments and economies. Last month, the Department of the Interior announced over \$2 million in grant funding under the Office of Insular Affairs' Coral Reef and Natural Resources initiative to protect coral reefs and also to combat invasive species which had been identified as a priority for 2018. Among other projects, these funds protect against the spread of the Little Fire Ant, *Wasmannia auropunctata*, infestation on the island of Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia; harmful black rats and mangrove monitor lizards in Ulithi Atoll, Yap, Federated States of Micronesia; the Crown of Thorns Starfish, *Acanthaster planci*, on coral reefs in Kosrae, Federated States of Micronesia; and the invasive flowering vine, *Merremia peltata*, in Palau. A separate initiative to combat the Brown Tree Snake on Guam and to prevent its spread to Hawaii and the larger Micronesia region received \$2.8 million in FY2018.

Employing Scientific Research: The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), part of the Department of the Interior, also works to research and combat invasive species throughout the Pacific. In FY2017, USGS supported risk analysis of freshwater invasive species in Federated States of Micronesia and Palau. In Niue, Fiji, and Solomon Islands, an international team including the USGS is surveying native and invasive reptiles and amphibians as well as invasive mammals and ants, and will produce an integrated report for the host government and identify locations of national significance for consideration as parks/reserves. In addition to invasive species, USGS conducts research into a number of challenges and opportunities impacting ecosystems in the Pacific islands, including water resource management, mangrove resilience, endangered species, offshore minerals, and sea level rise. For example, recent USGS research into *Aedes* and *Culex* mosquitoes, two disease vectors that are common on Pacific Islands, recently demonstrated how rat eradication can lead to local *Aedes* extinction at the Palmyra Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. This success informs future research on mosquito eradication opportunities elsewhere that could reduce human disease or avian malaria in endemic Pacific island birds.

Combatting Ocean Acidification: Ocean acidification poses a threat to ocean ecosystems, which are a source of tourism, fisheries revenues, and food security for the Pacific Islands. To increase our understanding of this phenomenon, in 2016 the United States announced the Enhancing Capacity for Ocean Acidification Monitoring and Mitigation (OAMM) program. OAMM is a

public-private partnership of government, civil society, and private stakeholders focused on building capacity of scientists in the Pacific Islands and Latin America to monitor ocean acidification and to assess the impact of seagrass restoration on local ocean chemistry. Through this project, the United States aims to increase worldwide coverage of the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON). OAMM has leveraged additional support for capacity building activities that helped expand the reach of the project. Since its launch, OAMM has hosted two science training workshops at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji; trained 23 scientists from 10 Pacific Islands countries; created and procured customized equipment kits for scientists in 7 countries; helped develop monitoring plans for 7 countries; created an e-learning space for kit recipients through the Ocean Acidification Information Exchange, and awarded three mentorship scholarships.

Building Resilience

USAID helps nations cope with changing environmental conditions, while improving lives and building a more sustainable, equitable future for all. USAID raises the capacity of Pacific Island communities, civil society, governments, and regional institutions to mitigate the impact of, and prepare for, natural disasters. Community-level projects serve as models for national governments, regional institutions, and other donors and stakeholders. USAID has strengthened resilience in 77 communities across nine Pacific Island countries by improving small-scale community infrastructure and building local capacity for disaster mitigation and preparedness. USAID has also awarded 28 grants to civil society organizations across 10 countries that support locally driven and innovative initiatives. In FY 2017, these grants expanded the adaptive capacity of more than 7,000 people to implement best practices in priority areas such as disaster risk management, coastal resource and forest management, sustainable agriculture, and livelihood development. At the national and regional levels, USAID fortifies the capability of governments and regional institutions to access global funding that will be used to boost their environmental resilience and natural resource management, as well as their ability to manage projects in a transparent, accountable, and effective manner. This approach will help solidify nations' sovereignty, while also supporting greater self-reliance. USAID is currently helping eight Pacific island countries to secure more than \$330 million in international funds.

Disaster Assistance

USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance supports disaster response and risk reduction programs across the Pacific region. As part of the Compact of Free Association Act of 2003, USAID implements disaster relief and reconstruction assistance in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). In the event of a U.S. Presidential Disaster Declaration in these two countries, USAID and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may provide direct relief, or rebuild housing, selected public infrastructure, and utilities. In 2015, for example, Typhoon Maysak destroyed houses, crops, and public infrastructure in FSM's Chuuk and Yap States. With funding from FEMA, USAID trained over 1,500 Micronesians to

help complete repairs or reconstruction of 422 new houses and 153 public buildings, such as schools, clinics, and community centers.

People-to-People Ties

The United States also works to build relationships with the peoples of the Pacific through nurturing future leaders, building capacity, and supporting cultural ties.

Nurturing Future Leaders: The United States is committed to working with the next generation of Pacific leaders and will support the sixth Young Pacific Leaders conference. This Department of State program gathers emerging leaders from Pacific Island nations to discuss issues of regional concern. The program features a small grants competition for participants to transform ideas into action. Program participants and prior conference alumni compete for up to 12 small grants up to \$10,000 each along the four YPL pillars: education, environment and resource management, civic leadership, and economic and social development. The full list of 2018 winners of the grants can be found here:

<https://nz.usembassy.gov/u-s-state-department-announces-2018-young-pacific-leaders-grant-recipients/>

The U.S.-South Pacific Scholarship Program, also sponsored by the Department of State, was established by the United States Congress in 1994 to provide opportunities for undergraduate and graduate degree study in the U.S. to students from the sovereign island nations of the South Pacific in fields important for the region's development. Current funding supports approximately three new scholarships annually for citizens from 11 South Pacific nations.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) separately supports several programs to develop future leaders in the three freely associated states – Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Palau – and in the U.S. island territories. For FY2018, DOI has committed over \$1 million to support the participation of insular area high school students in the Junior State of America and Close Up Programs. DOI has also separately provided technical assistance funds to promote robotics programs for high school students and teachers in the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau. Through a contract with the Graduate School USA, DOI also funds the Executive Leadership Development Program, a one-year program of personal and professional development for mid-level professionals from the U.S. territories and freely associated states.

The Department of State's EducationUSA provides academic advising to students across the Pacific and strategic guidance to U.S. higher education institutions seeking to engage these student audiences. In FY18, the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs provided \$41,800 to support EducationUSA activities in the Pacific. The network's activities in the sub-region are coordinated by the EducationUSA Regional Educational Advising Coordinator based in Seoul, Republic of Korea. According to the annual *Open Doors* report, 510 students from the Pacific studied in the United States in the 2016-17 academic year.

Fulbright Programs: Through the Department of State's Fulbright Visiting Student Program, applicants from nine Pacific Island countries compete regionally for fully funded scholarships for one- or two-year master's degree programs in the United States. American candidates also apply for Fulbright grants to conduct research in the region. Last year the Department of State supported three Fulbright students from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa for graduate study in the United States. Three U.S. Fulbright students conducted research in Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa. The Fulbright Specialist Program awards two- to six-week grants to American scholars and professionals who carry out collaborative projects at the request of host institutions. In FY 2018, the Department of State will provide over \$5,000 for one Specialist to travel to Papua New Guinea to train professors and students in business-case writing at the University of Papua New Guinea.

Cultural Preservation: The Department of State, through the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP), will provide a \$375,000 USD grant for the preservation of the Nan Madol World Heritage site in the Federated States of Micronesia. Since 2001, AFCP has awarded a total of \$1.2 million in grants to support 27 cultural heritage preservation projects in the Pacific Islands. The Historic Preservation Offices in all U.S. territories and in the three freely associated states also collectively receive approximately \$3 million annually from the Historic Preservation Fund which is administered by the Department of the Interior's National Park Service.

Science and Technology: The United States facilitates numerous placements of American Embassy Science Fellows (ESFs) in the Pacific Islands. ESFs are dispatched by the Department of State from U.S. government technical agencies for one to three months and provide advanced scientific expertise to U.S. embassies and host countries, allowing the United States and its partners in the Pacific to advance American interests while supporting key mutual national security, economic, and/or scientific goals. In 2017-2018, ESFs undertook projects across the Pacific Islands in a variety of disciplines, including oceanography, fisheries, marine sciences, renewable energy, and health.

Health Initiatives: The Department of State's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) funded a number of local initiatives combatting the spread of mosquito borne illnesses. This included support for teacher-training on the Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) science mosquito protocol for teachers in Fiji, and a program to educate youth on mosquito borne illnesses, monitoring, and vector surveillance in Koror, Palau. The Department of State hosted a 2-day "TechCamp" in Auckland, New Zealand which brought together 40 health communicators, health and business professionals, government officials, and community leaders from seven Pacific countries to increase their organizational capacity and develop tech solutions to help them expand public health communications about mosquito-borne diseases in the region. Papua New Guinea, the Cook Islands, Tonga, and Fiji received small grants for follow-on projects including using the CDC EpiInfo App for data collection and SMS mobile messaging to engage lab workers. In addition, OES selected the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau as implementation countries for its

new [GLOBE Zika Education and Prevention Project](#). The two-year project, in partnership with NASA's GLOBE program, brings together public health professionals and citizen scientists to improve the tracking and control of mosquitoes and reduce disease.

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