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American Samoa Government Proposes Conservation Purchase at CCCAS 35th General Conference

Pago Pago, American Samoa - On July 24, 2024, the American Samoa Government (ASG) made an impassioned presentation at the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa (CCCAS) 35th General Conference asking the Church to sell 5 acres of land known as Naumati to ASG for preservation. Held in the presence of over 600 delegates representing member churches from Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, and American Samoa, Director Taotasi Archie Soliai delivered an impactful presentation on behalf of ASG.

The ASG formally requested the CCCAS to consider selling its 5 acres of land in the Naumati rainforest to conserve in perpetuity, protecting it from threats of development. Based on a recent valuation, the Naumati forest is valued at \$425,000 per acre, bringing the total offer to \$2,167,000. The Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) has submitted a project proposal to the Forest Legacy Program for funds to purchase additional land, including 22 acres belonging to the Haleck family.

Despite the compelling offer and the detailed benefits outlined by Director Soliai, the CCCAS decided to retain its assets and not sell the land to the ASG. Director Soliai emphasized that the DMWR remains committed to its mission to conserve the Naumati forest and expressed hope that the church might reconsider its decision in the future for the benefit of future generations. Honorable Lieutenant Governor La'apui Talauega E.V. Ale also spoke in support of the sale at the conclusion of the presentation, expressing the support of the Governor's Office in the effort to preserve Naumati.

The presentation highlighted several critical benefits of preserving the Naumati forest, including:

- **Preserving God's Divine Creation:** Emphasizing the spiritual and ecological significance of maintaining the natural environment.

- **Protecting Groundwater Recharge Areas:** Essential for providing clean drinking water.
- **Flood Mitigation:** Serving as a natural retention area for floodwaters, particularly benefiting the Tafuna Plains area.
- **Protected and Endangered Species:** Providing habitat for protected birds and bats, and endangered species such as the Eua zebrina snail.
- **Ancient Cultural Aspects:** Preserving significant cultural sites like Tia Seulupe (starmounds).
- **Educational Awareness:** Offering opportunities for youth to learn about conservation and the environment.

The ASG and DMWR will continue their efforts to protect the Naumati forest, highlighting the importance of environmental conservation and cultural preservation for the prosperity and well-being of the community and future generations.

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