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American Samoa joins the 26th Micronesia Islands Forum as an Observer: Enhancing Regional Cooperation and Unity

The Honorable Lourdes Leon Guerrero, Governor of Guam, made a historic move in modern Pacific Islands affairs as the chairperson and host of the 26th Micronesia Islands Forum (MIF) by extending an invitation to American Samoa to participate as an observer. The MIF is currently taking place at the Hyatt Regency in Tumon, Guam from June 3-5, 2024. Leading the American Samoa delegation is Honorable Lt. Governor La'apui Talauega E. V. Ale. American Samoa's participation in this year's MIF marks a pivotal step towards enhancing regional cooperation and unity among Pacific Island nations, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts to address shared challenges and promote sustainable development.

At the opening day of the Forum, Lt. Governor La'apui emphasized the value of this opportunity as a means to strengthen regional bonds. "Collaboration and strengthening ties with our brothers and sisters from across the Pacific is crucial for our shared prosperity and resilience," stated Lt. Governor La'apui. "By working together, we can address common challenges and build a brighter future for all our Pacific communities."

American Samoa's participation in the forum broadens regional dialogue and promotes the exchange of best practices on critical issues such as economic development, climate change resilience, and regional security. Governor Leon Guerrero's invitation and Lt. Governor La'apui's attendance highlights a mutual commitment to fostering strong relationships and the spirit of solidarity among the Pacific Islands.

The Forum serves as a vital platform for discussing key subregional issues and forging partnerships that enhance stability and growth. The inclusion of American Samoa in these discussions this year reflects Guam's dedication to comprehensive and inclusive regional engagement, reinforcing the cultural and historical bonds that unite Pacific Island communities.

During the opening of the Forum on Monday June 3, 2024, leaders from the Micronesia Islands discussed challenges facing their subregion, with climate change threats as a primary focus. Discussions included ambitious plans to transition to 70% renewable energy by 2030 while also bolstering tourism

through new green partnerships. Conservation and building climate resilience were also emphasized, as rising seas and extreme weather continue to endanger communities and cultural heritage across the islands.

Key topics included sustainable development of blue economies, with commitments to improving tuna fisheries transparency to curb illegal fishing through new technology initiatives. The leaders also prioritized establishing air routes and reducing shipping fees to overcome prohibitively high transportation costs that impede trade, tourism, and affordable living.

Other pressing issues raised were non-communicable diseases, education, and invasive species. Proposals for a health summit and summits on education and invasive species aim to address these challenges through vocational training and ecosystem protection. Leaders also pledged support for a well-resourced Micronesian Islands Forum Secretariat to implement their initiatives effectively.

The first day of the Forum demonstrated the subregion's leaders' shared commitment to regional cooperation and action on climate, economic, health, and conservation issues facing their island nations.

The highlight of the first day of the Forum was the proposed subregional expansion of Guam Green Growth (G3), an initiative aimed at promoting sustainable development and addressing environmental challenges in Guam. G3 focuses on fostering a green economy, improving resource management, and enhancing the island's resilience to climate change. Through projects targeting renewable energy, waste reduction, sustainable agriculture, and conservation efforts, G3 engages the community, businesses, and government in collaborative efforts to create a more sustainable and environmentally friendly future for Guam. The proposed expansion looks at regional coordination for local action.

In a significant diplomatic gesture, the United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken penned a letter endorsing the associate membership of American Samoa and Guam in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and Governor Guerrero shared this on record at today's Forum. This endorsement underscores the strategic importance of these U.S. territories in the Pacific region and highlights their role in regional cooperation and development. Blinken's letter reflects the United States' commitment to strengthening ties with Pacific Island nations and supporting the integration of American Samoa and Guam into regional organizations, thereby enhancing their visibility and influence in regional affairs.

The final day of the Forum's main agenda takes place Tuesday June 3, 2024. Lt. Governor La'apui and the American Samoa delegation look forward to further supporting Governor Leon Guerrero and the Territory of Guam during the final agenda items, with a particular focus on American jurisdictions and their future in the framework of the regional architecture.

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