

Remarks by U.S. Secretary of the Interior David L. Bernhardt for the 31st PIF Leaders Session with Forum Dialogue Partners

Good morning. I have the distinct privilege to bring the greetings and warm wishes to you on behalf of President Trump.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to thank Prime Minister Sopoaga and all of the people of Tuvalu for hosting this meeting. Also, I thank Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor for the invitation to participate today.

President Trump knows that the United States is a Pacific Nation, and he appreciates that we are longtime friends and partners with each of the countries here today.

We share a commitment to respecting sovereignty, and we fundamentally believe in the rule of law. We are committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes, and we recognize our shared responsibility to serve as stewards of the Pacific Ocean, which supports the livelihoods for our entire region.

We have a deep and longstanding commitment to the future security, prosperity, and well-being of the people within the Pacific.

This commitment starts at the very top with President Trump. It includes me here today to engage in a dialogue to further our collective interests.

I believe the President's personal interest is unprecedented. I joined President Trump in the White House when he hosted the leaders of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau for a historic meeting this May.

He was the first president of the United States to ever host such a meeting.

In addition, Vice President Pence visited Papua New Guinea for APEC last year.

Secretary Pompeo visited the Marshall Islands, and he and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Wilkie made recent visits to the Federated States of Micronesia, where Secretary Pompeo committed the United States to begin negotiations with the Freely Associated States on amendments to certain provisions of the Compacts of Free Association.

I also had the opportunity to engage with PIF Leaders and the Deputy Secretary General over breakfast this morning to better understand your priorities and concerns about the future of this region. I thank you for that opportunity.

One priority of this body – and President Trump -- is clear. And, that is our ability to address environmental challenges, so people can have the highest quality of life.

We must all have clean air and clean water. We each must be good stewards of our lands. We must prioritize the cleanup of polluted lands and waters that threaten our most vulnerable citizens.

We, at the same time, must also implement pro-growth policies to unlock innovation and new technologies, which will improve everyone's quality life and that of our environment.

We firmly believe in a balanced approach that promotes economic growth and improves energy security while protecting the environment.

The United States is leading by example by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. U.S. net greenhouse gas emissions dropped 13% from 2005-2017, even as our economy grew over 19 percent.

Pro-business and pro-environment policies are not mutually exclusive.

We also recognize that each country faces unique circumstances and risks. Our nation has long been engaged in supporting disaster risk reduction programs aimed at saving lives and minimizing the impact in the Pacific.

We will continue to work with you to build your resilience to environmental challenges such as sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and natural disasters, as well as to deploy innovative energy technologies.

The Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has been a global leader in these efforts. I'm pleased to announce that they will be strengthening island resiliency to natural disasters by increasing the grants for the Coral Reef Conservation Program and will continue to provide critical data and intelligence by monitoring our environment and climate through the Pacific Integrated Ocean Observing System. NOAA will also be cleaning our waterways from debris through their matching grant program, and they will provide additional support for the Port State Measures Agreement to build capacity with law enforcement combating IUU fishing, the trade in IUU fish products and wildlife trafficking.

The US Agency for International Development is also stepping up and playing a bigger role within the region as well. USAID will be expanding its presence, placing Senior Development Advisors in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau. This is in addition to increases in diplomatic personnel at several of the U.S. embassies throughout the region.

Know that when they worst does happen, you always have the full support and attention of the United States. Notably this year, USAID provided disaster assistance to Micronesia as authorized by the Federal Emergency Management Agency following Typhoon Wutip in March.

We also are expanding our efforts to meet the most pressing infrastructure and economic challenges in the Pacific.

We will continue to support the PIF as you work to enhance regional security through implementation of the Boe Declaration. We were pleased to partner with the PIF last spring to support national security policy development, and we look forward to hosting a regional workshop later this month on cybersecurity.

These efforts are just a few initiatives within our Indo-Pacific Strategy and are in addition to the approximately \$350 million in support that U.S. agencies annually spend in projects, assistance, and operations in the Pacific.

In closing, the United States is a Pacific nation. We respect your sovereignty. We believe in freedom and liberty. And, we are committed to working with you in addressing critical challenges facing our great nations. Thank you.