President Kabua addresses the Pacific Island Conference of Leaders.

His Excellency David Kabua addressed the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders (PICL) earlier today. In his address, the President congratulated His Excellency Panuelo, President of Federated States of Micronesia for his leadership as chair of the PICL for the last two years and also offered his sincere condolences to His Excellency Panuelo for the passing of Yosiwo P. George, Vice President of the Federated States of Micronesia.

In his address, noting that this is the first in-person gathering since 2016, the President raised priority issues that greatly affect the Marshall Islands as well as the wider Pacific Region. But firstly, the President reflected on the word "Pu'uhonua - The Pacific Way Forward" and offered his insights into the word, " it is refreshing to feel how unique we are as Pacific Islands that there is always a place for us to find refuge. And that place is our regional unity, when we help each other and work together like the ocean that binds us. Let our hearts bind us together for a dignified purpose for the common good of all men. Then I believe we may have redefined the true meaning of the word Pacific."

President welcomed the announcement from the United States through Vice President Kamala Harris in Fiji to increase its engagements with the Pacific Island Nations in new commitments such as to provide support for our only regional university in the University of the South Pacific, the opening of US International Development Finance Corporation programs, and expansion of trade benefits under the Compact for the tuna sector.

The President raised the issue of the Nuclear Legacy: " the nuclear legacy in the Marshall Islands is a painful issue and its ongoing impacts in the Pacific including the Runit Dome that need to be addressed."

President reiterates that we rely on the health of the Pacific Ocean for our livelihood and as our primary resources for economic development. We must safeguard these resources; hence the need for help in deterring illegal activities that may harm the ocean and our livelihoods.. President Kabua acknowledges Australia and the U.S. in its existing maritime security arrangements, however, President pointed out that "our own capacity" must be built, "But until our own capacity is built and we have a more direct role in our own fisheries , other distant water fishing nations will continue to reap the most benefits from this industry." We must not continue to be marginalized in our own backyard. The resources are ours and we must be the ones who benefit most from it.

President stated that the most significant security risk facing the Blue Pacific is Climate change. He gently reminded his colleagues and the panelists that the Pacific is already experiencing loss and damage due to the climate crisis and that low-lying countries such as the Marshall Islands are in the very frontlines of this crisis. The President offers to his colleagues that transformational adaptation is needed to preserve the ability to determine our future and protect our national security. He touched upon the inability to access funding and international finances for mitigation and adaptation to Climate Change, which further complicates adaptation challenges.

In concluding his statement, the President thanked Chairman Panuelo, the PICL Standing Committee, PIDP and the East-West Center for graciously hosting this very important conference.

The PICL runs through 12 September and will conclude on the 14th. The PICL gives the opportunity to the leaders to discuss and dialogue with the Asia-Pacific Non-PICL Member countries; PICL Secretariate and hold dialogues on US engagement in the Pacific with US representatives of State; dialogue on industry diversification; and on China in Oceania.

Along the margins of the PICL, President Kabua and Honorable Kitlang Kabua, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, will also engage in bilateral talks with other countries attending the PICL.

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