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The Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, D.C.

TAIWAN PRESIDENT MA REQUESTS MEETING WITH FALEOMAVAEGA TO DISCUSS RELATIONS WITH U.S. AND PACIFIC ISLANDS; FUTURE OF FISHERIES IN AMERICAN SAMOA TOPS AGENDA

The Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, Rep. Eni F.H. Faleomavaega, announced that on Wednesday, March 31, he met with President Ma Ying-jeou of the Republic of China (Taiwan) to discuss relations with the United States and Pacific Island nations. President Ma made the request to meet with Faleomavaega upon learning that the Chairman would be traveling on assignment in Asia.

Two meetings were held between the leaders – one official and one private. President Ma thanked Chairman Faleomavaega for his support for Taiwan, and especially for the recent \$6.4 billion arms sale by the United States.

In turn, Faleomavaega reaffirmed the United States' long-standing one-China policy and noted that, for some time, past administrations had flip-flopped about the sale, but President Obama went forward despite China's highly critical stance.

“The sale is strictly for defense purposes,” Faleomavaega said, “to provide Taiwan with defense capabilities in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act.”

With Taiwan-Beijing trade totaling more than \$100 billion annually, both leaders agreed that promoting peaceful relations across the Straits is important to Taiwan and Beijing, as well as in the interest of the United States.

Regarding U.S.-Taiwan relations, President Ma asked for Faleomavaega’s assistance in advancing trade, extradition, and visa waiver issues.

On the subject of Taiwan’s growing presence in the Pacific Islands, President Ma said, “Last week I visited Taiwan’s diplomatic allies in the Pacific Islands and I experienced the warmth of the people there. I would like to once again extend a warm welcome to you as you have been a friend of Taiwan’s for many, many years.” President Ma also thanked Faleomavaega for rescheduling his trip to accept Taiwan’s invitation to visit.

The two leaders talked about climate change and its impact on vulnerable and marginalized societies such as Tuvalu and Kiribati. Faleomavaega called upon Taiwan to assume a more prominent role in the region by providing expertise and assistance to help Pacific Island nations address the serious environmental and economic challenges they face.

President Ma referred to Taiwan’s 6-3-0 program – 6 types of vegetables, 3 years and zero imports – Taiwan’s new initiative to encourage Pacific islanders to change their daily diets and adopt a healthier lifestyle.

Faleomavaega informed President Ma that one of his primary reasons for accepting Taiwan’s invitation to visit was to discuss the future of the tuna industry in American Samoa and among Pacific Island nations.

“I previously visited southern Taiwan, which is home to one of the biggest fisheries in the world,” Faleomavaega said. “Today’s tuna industry totals about \$4 billion annually, yet Pacific Island nations and American Samoa are not getting their fair share of revenue even though the resources are being taken from our waters. It is my hope that Taiwan will work closely with us in rebuilding and reshaping the tuna industry in a way that makes American Samoa the hub for the U.S. market while at the same time partnering with Pacific Island nations to develop their fishing fleets, given that Taiwan’s technology is unparalleled.”

President Ma agreed that Taiwan would lend its support and especially would do all it could to help American Samoa. In a show of good-faith, President Ma’s administration arranged high-level meetings between Faleomavaega and top industry leaders, including FCF, the largest fish trading company in the world, which Faleomavaega had previously met through the late Dave Burney, former President and CEO of the U.S. Tuna Foundation.

At a separate meeting hosted by the Deputy Foreign Minister, Faleomavaega exchanged ideas with FCF and other fishery executives. Taiwan’s Director General for North America in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the cannery in American Samoa is vital to Taiwan’s economy.

FCF plainly stated that American Samoa is core to its plans for growth and that no matter what happens, “we are supporting American Samoa.”

FCF also stated that it had bid on the StarKist facility prior to its purchase by Dongwon, and that FCF was the second highest bidder. FCF said that, under the right circumstances, it might have an interest in the COS facility, but that it had not entered into discussions at this time and that it has had no contact with ASG.

“FCF is supportive of the revised version of ASPIRE, and FCF has asked to work closely with my office on federal matters relating to the tuna fishing and processing industries in American Samoa,” Faleomavaega said. “I am very encouraged by our talks and also by my discussions with Chairman Kim in South Korea regarding the future of our local tuna industry.”

“I have every reason to believe that American Samoa can adapt with the times and carve out a niche of its own, even though the tuna industry has undergone a tremendous transformation. But our success, as always, will require patience, hard work and the full support and prayers of our people,” Faleomavaega concluded.

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