



WELCOME ADDRESS

H.E. Joseph J. Urusemal
President
Federated States of Micronesia
[December 12, 2005]

(SALUTATIONS)

It is hard to believe that 12-months have elapsed since we met here for the first time as the western and central pacific fisheries commission. But 12 months have indeed elapsed - and a lot has happened in that time.

Before I proceed to reflect a little on the last 12 months, on behalf of the government and people of Federated States of Micronesia it is indeed a pleasure to welcome you all to our small country and to host the important discussions that are before the commission this week.

I know that many of you were here last year and are anxious to get on with the demanding schedule before you. I will only hold you for a short time to make sure that those new to our beautiful island know how much we consider it a pleasure to be hosting your visit. I extend a special welcome

To those that have acceded to the convention since the inaugural meeting and are sitting at the table as full members of the commission. I encourage those who have not done so to complete their constitutional requirements to become full members. Welcome all of you and i look forward to interacting with you during the week.

While here i encourage all of you to take advantage of some of the interesting excursions that are available - to surf, to fish, to dive or just to relax on the waters of our extensive lagoons. We want to make sure that you leave Pohnpei with pleasant memories - not just memories of a large meeting room, late night negotiations, a haze of fisheries information and trepidation about the amount of work expected of the commission in 2006 if it is to become the effective regional fisheries management organization we all hope for.

Since the first meeting of the commission last December, an executive director has been recruited and the secretariat office was opened here last October. The recruitment process for the three senior staff positions is already underway and is in its final stages. About two weeks ago i signed the host government agreement extending privileges and immunities to the commission and its staff. Thanks to the tireless effort of Chairman Hurry (he really hurry things up) and the support of the government of Australia for the smooth establishment of the secretariat. Now we have a functioning secretariat which has managed well to put things together for these meetings despite its late start and limited human and

funding resources at the start.

Two subsidiary bodies of the commission, the scientific committee and the technical and compliance committee have successfully had their inaugural meetings.

To all of us, the most impressive development in the last 12 months has been the rapid construction of the headquarters building for the commission. I've lost count of the number of comments that I have received, since 16th June when construction commenced, marveling at the speed, the quality of workmanship and the sheer enormity of this building project according to our small island standard. It is without doubt the highlight for the year in terms of building construction in this nation!

Of course the building would not have been possible without the commitment and hard work of a large number of people. Foremost among these are the government and people of Pohnpei state for the generous donation of the land where the building is located - an area of public land covering almost 14,000 square meters.

For such a small island where land is limited and so highly valued this is indeed a charitable donation that is appreciated by us all. We all thank the leadership and the people of Pohnpei for this kind gesture.

And then there is the building itself. Through you ambassador yang, and on behalf of all those present here today and those they represent, I would like to express our sincere appreciation once again for your funding support. It is certainly a building about which we can all be proud and it will undoubtedly serve the needs of the tuna commission for many years to come. In literal terms, the government of the people's republic of china has laid a very solid foundation upon which to build a productive future for this commission.

I am pleased to report that with the turn-over of the building within the month, the fsm will have delivered on all the items in our overture to host the commission headquarter. Of course, our commitment is there and we will continue to work closely with and assist the executive director and secretariat staff in what ever we can to facilitate their work and the work of this commission.

In other areas, progress has not perhaps evolved as all of us hoped for at the conclusion of the inaugural session of the commission last year.

But, in my speech to open last year's meeting, I did say it wasn't going to be easy and that the commission would be faced with many challenges.

Of foremost concern is the increasing uncertainty relating to the continued capacity of regional yellowfin and bigeye resources stocks to support current levels of fishing effort and catch. For several years we have heard from scientists from both the coastal states in the region and distant water fishing nations caution against increasing the harvest levels of these two species.

Several times during the multilateral high level conference and the subsequent preparatory conference concerned at the capacity of these resources to support current levels of fishing, we agreed to resolutions that our fishing capacity would not be increased. That has not been the case.

We've been advised that, not to do so, exposes these resources to the risk that sustainable fisheries operations will be threatened. And this is in no-one's interests - particularly to many in the region like the Federated States of Micronesia which do not have the benefit of other resources to support our economic development.

So it is with utmost concern that I've learned that the commission's own scientific committee, at its meeting in New Caledonia in August, again cautioned about the apparent over-fishing

Occurring in the region in respect of the yellowfin and bigeye resources. The technical and compliance committee that met last week took on board the advice of the scientific committee and, together, both committees have some very definite and firm advice for the commission to consider this week.

Distinguished delegates,

We have a responsibility to act on the advice of these two highly respected committees at this session of the commission. I look forward to a response that demonstrates a determined and committed effort to address these concerns through practical, transparent and implementable measures that safeguard the long-term interests of all of us in these resources.

As I said last year, the decisions that we arrive at in order to achieve the long term goal of sustained utilization of the region's tuna resources will involve concessions from all those currently involved in the fishery. This is a fact of the situation. If the current levels of fishing are excessive and not sustainable, steps will need to be taken to reduce the fishing effort in a way that does not unfairly disadvantage anyone that has a demonstrated long-term and dependent interest in the fishery. Nevertheless, catches must be reduced.

Entering into these discussions I appeal to everyone, my brothers from the island countries and our partners from the fishing states equally, to think in our collective long term and shared interests for a sustainable fishery. To achieve this there is need for an unconditional commitment to apply the constraints required. Again I say to you, let's do away with all the rhetoric and commit ourselves to action. As the debates continue more fish are being taken and the closer we get to depleting these important stocks in a region so dependent on them. If we merely produce resolutions, and do not actually implement those resolutions to effect real changes, this organization is going to attract disparaging comments from around the globe very rapidly indeed.

A second area of significant concern that we've monitored during the last 12 months is a major increase in the costs of fuel. Twelve months ago fuel in Pohnpei was us\$2.75 a gallon. Today it is us\$3.45. That's a 70 cents or 25% increase on the gallon within a short 12-month period. While my fellow residents here on Pohnpei feel the crunch.

Every-time they go to the fuel pump it is the fishermen who are really suffering - fuel, as it does, making up such a large proportion of the costs of operating a fishing vessel.

Fish prices haven't gone up in proportion to the rises in fuel costs the last 12 months and so all of the fishermen, not just those from Pacific island countries, are suffering. In fact fish prices have remained at about the same level over the years while fuel price continues to climb. I'm not sure what the long-term outcome from continued sustained high oil prices will be but I do know that, if current prices continue, it is likely to change the dynamics of regional tuna fisheries, and thus significantly influence the issues before the commission.

The Convention provides for a special requirement fund to enable developing states and territories to effectively participate in the work of the commission. It is very important that developing states and territories within the convention area whose livelihood are dependent on the resources of the region equally participate in and contribute to every aspects of the work of the commission. In that regard, I thank the United States, still a cooperating non-member, for its kind contribution to the fund and urge other members to contribute to the fund.

FSM relies on healthy fish stocks, along with other Pacific Island countries. With this in mind i am very pleased to learn that a ministerial level meeting of the parties to the Nauru Agreement held on Saturday endorsed progress towards a new scheme will introduce a limit on the number of days of purse seine fishing. The scheme will be introduced on a provisional basis for at least 12 months so that administrative and monitoring systems can be developed. This management scheme will be one of the largest of its kind in the world and we look to the commission to support the scheme and to implement compatible measures to ensure our precious tuna resource is not squandered.

I will leave you with these thoughts and in the very capable hands of your chairman, Mr. Hurry. I know that you have a very full agenda for the next five days. I assure you I will be receiving a briefing of the major decisions of the meeting on a daily basis and will be taking a very real interest in all your decisions.

If there is anything we can do to assist your deliberations or make your stay with us more comfortable, please contact anyone on the fsm delegation for assistance.

Thank you and I wish you all a very productive meeting, season's greetings to you and your loved ones and all the very best wishes for the coming year.

I now have the pleasure of declaring the Second Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission open.

Thank you.