United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 21, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

As we approach the annual Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders Meeting taking place in Tonga from August 26 to 30, we respectfully ask that the U.S. delegation to the PIF prioritize sustaining robust levels of diplomatic engagement with PIF countries and communicate the clear importance of relations with Pacific Islands countries as a key component of U.S. foreign policy in the region and more broadly in the Indo-Pacific.

Over recent years, the United States has worked to cultivate broader and deeper engagement with the countries of the Pacific Islands region. From publishing the Pacific Partnership Strategy to hosting the first-ever U.S. Pacific Island Country Summit, the United States has elevated our engagement with the Pacific Islands region to a foremost U.S. foreign policy priority.

Congress has also demonstrated broad, bipartisan support for engagement with the Pacific Islands countries as a strategic U.S. foreign policy priority. In addition to the recent modernization of economic assistance to the three Compacts of Free Association countries for the next 20 years, this year's State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill sustains robust assistance programs and diplomatic engagement with Pacific Island countries. Multiple hearings on U.S. policy in the region through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as well as bilateral and multilateral engagement with leaders in the region by Members of Congress, continue to convey the level of attention and importance placed on the region across the U.S. government.

As a dialogue partner of the PIF, it is critical that the United States continue to demonstrate this commitment to the region as a strong ally that will support the sovereignty, security, and economic development of countries in the region. Aligned with this year's PIF Leaders meeting theme, "Transformative Resilient Pasifiki, Build Better Now," we believe the United States should push forward tangible implementation of deliverables outlined in the Pacific Partnership Strategy, previous U.S.-Pacific Islands Forum summits and elsewhere.

In particular, we ask that the delegation provide clear updates to PIF members at the meeting on the following U.S. deliverables, including:

- Openings of U.S. embassies in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Tonga, including a timeline for the provision of consular services;
- Progress on opening up an embassy in Kiribati;
- Ensuring diplomatic missions in the region are adequately staffed and have a permanent, on-the-ground presence;

- Increasing cabinet and sub-cabinet level visits to the region;
- Supporting other regional organizations, including the Pacific Community and the Micronesian Islands Forum;
- Implementation of the Compacts of Free Association;
- Status of the USAID mission in Fiji and its operations;
- Implementation of the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability in Papua New Guinea and coordination on the Defense Cooperation Agreement;
- Implementation of the Partners in the Blue Pacific Fisheries and Ocean Science Vessel Initiative;
- Provision of programming and support for healthcare systems and healthcare infrastructure of Pacific Islands countries; and the
- Return of the Peace Corps to a number of countries in the region.

We also ask that the U.S. delegation consider providing further information to facilitate PIF's designation as an international organization by U.S. standards so that the PIF may have a permanent representative in Washington. Through close coordination and cooperation with regional nations and territories, we hope that the United States can continue to collaborate with the PIF on enhancing maritime security; building secure, resilient and sustainable infrastructure; combatting transnational crime and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; addressing corruption, ensuring free and fair elections without malign foreign interference; supporting law enforcement and judicial training; devising regional standards for international policing partners; and supporting educational and labor opportunities for youth and women.

Through all these efforts, the United States should continue to reaffirm our commitment to fostering people-to-people ties with countries and territories of the Pacific Islands region. The importance of robust U.S. engagement with PIF nations cannot be understated, and we ask that the U.S. delegation to the Leaders Meeting express our clear, sustained support for broader and deeper diplomatic relations with PIF nations for decades to come.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

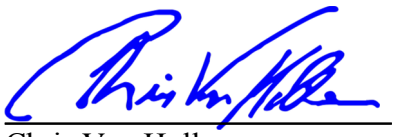
Sincerely,

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Pete Ricketts
United States Senator

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

John Boozman
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator