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American Samoa Welcomes Pacific Islands Forum Delegation and Commences Membership Discussions



The American Samoa Government welcomed the delegation from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) yesterday with an *Ava* ceremony. During this ceremonial event, Lt. Governor La'apui Talauega Ale expressed appreciation to His Excellency Ratu William Toganivalu, the Fiji Roving Ambassador to Pacific Island Countries and Territories and Agencies of the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific, and Mr. Teanuanua Nicole, Governance Officer from the PIF Secretariat, for visiting American Samoa to evaluate our membership application. His Excellency Ratu William Toganivalu, upon receiving the *ava*, expressed gratitude to the American Samoa people in his native Fijian language. The *Ava* ceremony was a meaningful demonstration of respect for both cultural traditions and the individuals present.

Following the *Ava* ceremony, a meeting convened at the Office of the Governor, with Lt. Governor La'apui, Dr. Dan Aga, Counsel Terry VanEaton, and the delegates, where discussions began on the following six criteria:

1. Whether the territory generally considers itself, and is considered by Forum members, as lying within the Pacific Islands region;
2. The territory's willingness and ability to participate in the Forum (noting that a lack of state resources and/or weak capacity should not of itself be a barrier to associate membership);
3. Whether the territory has control of its own budget such that it is empowered to make the appropriate financial contruntion for associate membership;
4. Whether the territory exercises a degree of self-government such that it determines its own policy on regional issues, and will represent itself and its own interests in regional meetings and groups;
5. Territory's commitment to the vision and purpose of the Forum;
6. Whether the admission of the territory as an associate member will contribute positively to the regional and international relations of the Forum and its members.

The first three criteria were addressed during the initial meeting. Lt. Governor La'apui emphasized the significance of American Samoa's participation in discussions beneficial to addressing our shared challenges with other island nations. "We are encountering similar challenges, and sharing best practices and having a voice are crucial to solving these issues together," shared the Lt. Governor.

Following the morning discussions, another meeting was held in the afternoon with Fono members, the Office of Political Status, the Office of Samoan Affairs, and the Office of the Attorney General to discuss criterion number 3. The remainder of the day was dedicated to scheduled site visits to American Samoa Community College (ASCC) and the Department of Education. The delegation was given a tour of the campus facilities, the Samoan Studies Institute, concluding at the Land Grant Department where they were shown the different projects currently undertaken by ASCC. In the evening, the Office of the Governor hosted a dinner at DDW to honor the delegation.

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