

For Official Release
PR 002-04192024
Office of the Governor
Utulei, American Samoa
April 19, 2024



American Samoa’s Pacific Island Forum Membership Efforts Proceeding as Planned

American Samoa’s efforts to seek Associate Membership status in the Pacific Islands Forum are not being opposed by the United States Department of State. While a news article first published by a Guam-based news outlet and then recirculated by several regional news sites suggest otherwise, American Samoa Government officials have received assurances from the State Department that this story is inaccurate.

“We received an email from State Department officials shortly after this article was published,” said Lt. Governor La’apui Talauega E. V. Ale, “They noted that the article suggested the State Department is not supportive of our PIF efforts and then told us that this is simply not true.”

“We have been engaged with the U.S. State Department on an ongoing basis as American Samoa navigates its way through this application process,” the Lt. Governor continued, “Governor Lemanu received a very encouraging letter from Assistant Secretary Daniel Kritenbrink earlier this year indicating that the State Department wanted to support our PIF efforts.”

Since receiving that letter, the Governor’s Office has held multiple virtual and in person meetings with State Department officials, including a meeting in Washington, D.C. while there for the Interagency Group on Insular Areas meeting and the winter meeting of the National Governors Association. These meetings all focused to some extent on the growing support for American Samoa’s application efforts.

“The journalist is referencing an outdated policy document that predates the U.S. government’s decision to support the territories’ status as observers in the PIF and is thus not entirely consistent with our current policy position,” the State Department email to ASG officials read. American Samoa received observer status with the Pacific Islands Forum in 2011.

“While there are still a few details to work out with the State Department, this email reassures us that their support of American Samoa’s participation in PIF as an associate member has not been withdrawn as this erroneous article suggests,” said the Lt. Governor, “Ultimately, our membership status is up to the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum. We continue to engage with our Pacific brothers and sisters during this application process and look forward to meeting with each of them in Tonga this August for the Leaders Meeting.”

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