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2022 Atoa o Samoa Executive Meeting

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Her Excellency Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa with her delegation of Cabinet Ministers arrived at the Pago Pago International Airport in Tafuna, American Samoa on Tuesday, July 25, 2022. Our guests of honor were welcomed and greeted by the Honorable Lemanu Palepoi Sialega Mauga, Governor of American Samoa with his delegation. Families of the Samoa delegation were also in attendance to greet them upon arrival.

A traditional ava ceremony was held on Wednesday, July 26th at the Su’igaula a le Atuvasa Park in Utulei to officially welcome our guests of honor. Soon after, delegations, observers and special guests held the official Atoa o Samoa Executive Meeting opening ceremony at the ASCC Multipurpose Center in Malaeimi. In their special remarks during the opening ceremony, both leaders highlighted a new beginning for the two Samoas to move forward independently and collaboratively in their government. “Although we are two separate governments that hold different political statuses, we are still one people. Atoa o Samoa will allow our delegations to discuss cooperation issues between the two Samoas,” Governor Lemanu stated in his opening remarks. He continued, “We are facing many hardships; however, there needs to be a collective approach for the resiliency of our people.”

“This fellowship marks the beginning of new administrations of both Samoas, however the spirit of the two governments working together towards mutual issues remains the goal,” Prime Minister Fiame stated in her special remarks. She continued, “The communication has begun to strengthen the relationship of our two Samoa Governments.”

On the final day, Prime Minister Fiame and Governor Lemanu, along with their respective delegations held discussions at the ASCC Multipurpose Center, American Samoa on the 28th of July on issues of mutual importance to the two Samoas. Key issues that were discussed are as follows: Health, Economy, Education, Information and Communication Technology, Immigration, Agriculture and Fisheries, Finance, Environment, Climate, Weather & Geoscience,

Transport between the two Samoas, Public Works matters, and Foreign Affairs and Trade. Other issues/matters discussed were cultural preservation of language and literacy, and Land Swap Agreement. These matters will be on the agenda for the next executive session.

Leaders discussed the need for advancement in healthcare in both regions. The mutual interests are in training opportunities for personnel, TeleHealth, and technological support. The Minister of Health mentioned the Bilateral Health Summit and similar workshops that provide training opportunities for all to attend.

American Samoa proposed a collaboration to enhance the tourism industry and attract investors, especially that AS is the gateway to the US market. The two Samoas agreed that both regions need to utilize the E-commerce/digital economy. Both Samoas expressed the demand for skilled workers and specialized professionals. Samoa mentioned the advantages of the Labor Mobility Agreement with New Zealand and Australia which provides opportunities for diverse skill-development and jobs for Pacific Island Nations. Samoa also mentioned that they have a Samoa Maritime Academy for programs in Nautical, Marine Engineering, and Fisheries.

A teacher-shortage remains a mutual concern for both Samoas and leaders have discussed ways to address this issue, some of which to work collaboratively in sharing resources and proactively participating in skill-building programs. Other matters of discussion included opportunities to train residents of American Samoa through the maritime and aviation programs.

When the Kingdom of Tonga lost all connections to the outside world as a result of the volcanic eruption, American Samoa has been looking into utilizing the Hawaiki Cable to its full capacity by extending a cable connection through the Pasefika. This will aid in closing the digital divide and building a digital economy.

Majority of the food supply for the two Samoas are imported. Samoa has offered American Samoa an opportunity to connect with the Scientific Research Organization of Samoa (SROS) to create products utilizing local resources.

The two Samoas discussed the importance of improving and solidifying processes of repatriating law violators. Other issues addressed and discussed included types of permits and the Guest Worker program.

Samoa offered assistance in establishing a financial facility (bank) in American Samoa as ANZ exits the territory. This will ensure all efforts of inter-Samoa trade, and expanding banking services in American Samoa.

Climate change remains a priority issue for both Samoas as the effects of it are prominent in the Pacific. Governor Lemanu has established the Governor's Resilience Office and the American Samoa Resilience Commission to hone in on these issues. Prime Minister Fiame shared that Samoa is looking into renewable energy. Both leaders have discussed the importance of collaborative efforts to continue resilience efforts.

The two Samoas expressed the need to preserve the Samoan culture and language so that it continues to pass on to generations long after. Samoa encourages American Samoa to participate in the Indigenous People's Conference. American Samoa recently created the Samoa Language Commission.

There was a conversation over the lack of direct communication between American Samoa Port Administration and Samoa Ministry of Transportation regarding the weekly transport of the passenger ferry of Lady Naomi. There was also a request to reconsider chartering fees to transport goods between both islands.

Discussions for American Samoa to have a seat in regional organizations to voice issues and concerns were raised by Samoa. This would allow for a collective voice in the Pacific region to address mutual issues.

As a result of the executive meeting, the two Samoas have mutually decided that the official name of the formerly known 2 Samoa Talks meeting, will now be the **Atoa o Samoa Executive Meeting** and will occur biannually. The next meeting will be hosted in Samoa in September 2022 during the Teuila Festival.

Following the closing of the executive meeting was a presentation of gifts exchanged by the two Samoas which included fine mats, siapo, tuna, and Samoa-made beverages and produce.

Other events that took place throughout the week was the Territorial Dinner Reception of the two Samoas that was held at the Governor Rex. E. Lee Auditorium on Wednesday evening. In attendance were the two government delegates and ministers, members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and business leaders in the private sector. Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa and her delegation concluded their trip with a visit to StarKist Friday morning to discuss the Guest Worker Program and join StarKist employees in their daily morning devotion.

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