

ISA COMMUNIQUE

Introduction

The inaugural meeting of Island Students Assembly (ISA) initiated by the Pacific Islands Researchers Forum (PIRF) and supported by the Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund (SPINF) was successfully held on Wednesday, 20th May 2009 in Tokyo, Japan.

The Pacific Island Students who are enrolled in different universities and scattered throughout Japan were invited to attend the meeting. Those who have accepted the invitation to be participants all attended and made this event more meaningful and successful. From the meeting and group discussions, the following concerns and grievances were accumulated as a result of participants' involvement in the ISA Meeting. There were different opinions and views expressed, some of which were beyond PIRF's roles; however, those issues which fits ISA aims and purposes are collated into two main captions as indicated below.

Challenges to Cultural Integration

As foreigners traveling into Japan for the first time and residing in a foreign land, it is always a culture shock. There are so many things to eat and taste, observe and see, get involve, learn and execute, adaptation to the four weather patterns, fast moving technologies, and etcetera during the course of the study duration in Japan. The lifestyle and everything about Japan as our host nation is very different from the normal and simple lifestyles in the Pacific Islands. The language barrier was the first that has to be faced, then comes other hurdles like cultural beliefs, government regulation, religion, clothing and weather, food, transportation, educational system, time tardiness, the accountability, reliability and trustworthiness that has to be learnt from while residing in Japan.

On individual perspectives, home sickness and loneliness was raised especially during the first few months of living in a foreign land. Nevertheless, as time goes by the acclimatization process takes place naturally and the know-how, what to do and expect automatically becomes a norm for foreigners. The reality of living in a foreign land is always the same regardless of country location. The need to stay input, focused and proceed with ones' own duties and responsibilities is utmost in all walks of life. The experiences of living in a foreign country is always helpful back in home countries as these experiences may dictate and change or be beneficial in ones' own profession and or implementation of duties.

Birds of a Feather

Participants felt that networking at student level would create a better understanding of the great potential that we Pacific Island Students studying in Japan have. This potential will be set as a platform for Pacific Island Students to contribute not only academically but socially to the Japanese community at large.

Students also felt that to deepen this networking a PIRF website should be created so that all Pacific Island Students in Japan can have easy access to networking information. The website will also be a tool for creating awareness to the Japanese community about the current Environmental impacts and problems that we Pacific Islanders face.

The website will also link into other researcher's forums that are based in the University of the South Pacific and other regional universities. This will enhance good research activities into the Pacific region thus helping us Pacific Islanders. The website can also serve as a link between researchers' in Japan and potential researches of the Pacific Universities in the region. The website can be a platform for students to publish their research papers online and also for easy access by interested parties.

PIRF to be involved in other cultural activities, this is one way for us Pacific Island students to showcase the Pacific to the Japanese community. Friendships and bonds formed this way will lead to home stays being developed thus giving us Pacific Island students an opportunity to experience Japan hospitality first hand.

As young scholars and future leaders or influential people (to be) in future, the need to get involved in the initial stages of "the web of networking" is important. A classic example of networking which worked is the successful hosting of the ISA meeting, this all started with simple networking connections and ideas which all those involved in the network played a part each to ensure its success.

Recommendations

- Networking to be sustained infinitely
- Pacific Islanders to show-case culture/educate Japanese through awareness etc
- Students to liaise with respective Pacific countries if need arises
- Set-up forum for discussions etc (newsletter, website...PIRF is already aware of this).
- Database of students to be retrieved from relevant authorities (nothing confidential)
- Alumni network to be effective upon return to respective countries after study completion
- PIRF to be involved in Pacific Island related activities (e.g. Pacific Fiesta, etc).
- ISA (PIRF) to act as liaison agent, facilitator, NGO dialogue creator, remain apolitical in any capacity if asked or be invited to participant in networking etc.
- ISA via PIRF, explore the issue of Pacific island region for the PALM V, especially the issue of supporting of high level education including scholarship.
- Research and related project development be made and recommended to public with focus on the below three pillars;
 - (i) economic growth with focus on agricultural promotion;
 - (ii) sustainable development with focus on renewable energy and water supply
 - (iii) human-to-human exchange, through enhancing the possibility for Pacific Island students to enter university at the undergraduate level.

Appeal activities for PALM V at Tomamu.

This year's PALM Summit took place on Friday and Saturday 22nd and 23rd May, 2009 in Tomamu, Hokkaido. Three PIRF members were given representation at the Summit that was closed to the media and public. One of its members Mr. Tevita Suka Mangisi joined the official delegation from Tonga. The two other members, Mr. Kunio Suenaga the Deputy Chairman for PIRF and Mr. Visoni M. Timote the Chairman for PIRF attended as NGOs to further increase publicity and promote awareness about PIRF and its activities.

The 2-day Summit meeting resulted in what has been called the PALM 5: Islanders' Hokkaido Declaration. This document reflects the current state or direction to which Japan and the Pacific Islands wish their regional engagement to go. The Declaration stipulates Japan's intention to provide assistance to the extent of 50 billion yen to Pacific island countries over next three years. With primarily focuses on Environment and Climate Change issue, the Leaders of Japan and the PIF also underlined the importance of promoting people-to-people exchange- The "Kizuna" Plan to build closer relations between Japan and Pacific island countries. Furthermore, Tuvalu went as far as requesting Japan to provide a quota for Pacific Island students to enter at the undergraduate level in universities around Japan. It is believed that three PIRF members' activities at PALM V has made a positive air for the Summit consensus on the education for Pacific island students.

The Leaders of PALM have expressly stated their support for NGO assistance and activities in island development. One Leader mentioned PIRF and ISA was a result of this human-to-human exchange component of the PALM mechanism. Another Leader expressly praised the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for its work in his country.

This was also an opportune time for PIRF to increase its networking with other NGOs and various media people from the domestic and Pacific Region to cover the events at the PALM Summit. PIRF was extremely fortunate to be in the spotlight. PIRF was interviewed by the various media present such as the Fiji TV, Youmiru Shimbun, Ashai Shimbun, Hokkaido Shimbun, The Fiji Sun and The Vanuatu Times.

Other NGOs were very interested in the network that PIRF has affiliations with and they verbally voiced the need for PIRF to collate information about the Pacific. They felt that as students we could always help the Japanese community have a deeper understanding about the Pacific, its unique culture, and its friendly people. Also, we as students could teach our Pacific Island people about Japan its rich culture, lifestyle and its people. These NGOs has also voiced their support in linking PIRF to their various NGO affiliates and resource personnel.

PIRF will continue to encourage and enhance Japan relations with the Pacific and at the same time deepen its contribution as future leaders in the Pacific Island Region.