

FSM Information Services

Press Release

FSM Citizen Repatriation Efforts to Begin with COVID-19 Free Jurisdictions

PALIKIR, Pohnpei—On September 22nd, 2020, His Excellency David W. Panuelo—President of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)—and the Honorable Yosiwo P. George, Vice President of the FSM, after several days of fruitful and in-depth engagements with the FSM COVID-19 Task Force, announced that the Nation’s repatriation efforts will begin with FSM citizens stranded in COVID-19 free jurisdictions. The President instructed the Chair of the COVID-19 Task Force and Secretary of the Department of Health & Social Affairs, the Honorable Livingston A. Taulung, to proceed with focusing all repatriation-related efforts on bringing home FSM citizens stranded in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The President described that the repatriation of citizens from COVID-19 free jurisdictions, such as the Marshall Islands, would be the ultimate test in assessing the Nation’s capacity to implement repatriation from COVID-19 affected jurisdictions, such as the U.S. Territory of Guam. By treating the Marshall Islands as a COVID-19 affected jurisdiction for repatriation purposes, the President explained, the FSM will be able to fully play out a live and genuine return-scenario, but without the actual threat of COVID-19 arriving into the Nation. Thus, if there are any more gaps or weaknesses in the adopted standard operating procedures, they would be identified and fixed without the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

“This Pandemic has been an extended hardship—emotionally, mentally, and financially—for our citizens stranded abroad and for our citizens at home,” the President said in a statement. “I appreciate and recognize that our citizens in the FSM support maintaining the closure of our border until such a time that the Pandemic is no longer a threat. I also recognize that our citizens stranded abroad are desperate to return home. I remain committed towards accomplishing the dual goals of preventing COVID-19’s entry into the FSM while ensuring the safe return of our citizens genuinely stranded abroad.”

“I appreciate and understand the sacrifices our citizens abroad in Guam and Hawaii have been making, either in the process of waiting to come home or by helping friends, family, and even strangers who are stranded. The Government continues to support citizens stranded abroad in multiple forms, totaling more than \$800,000 of assistance, whether it’s through per diem and lodging provided by MiCare to medical patients, financial support to students, or the Stranded Citizens financial package, which has helped more than 250 of our citizens. We remain committed to exploring additional means of support where possible.”

“With the rising cases of COVID-19 in Guam and around the world, with nearly one million deaths globally, and more than 200,000 in the United States, 35 of which are in Guam, FSM citizens deserve the absolute best system in place to keep them safe from the virus. There’s no better test than real life, no better practice than the real thing, and I am confident that repatriation of our citizens stranded in the Marshall Islands will demonstrate, without any shadow of a doubt, on whether or not we are truly ready to begin the repatriation of our citizens stranded in COVID-19 affected countries and territories.”

To the knowledge of the FSM National Government, approximately 40 FSM citizens are stranded in the Marshall Islands, the bulk of whom are residents of Pohnpei State and Chuuk State. For comparison, it is to the knowledge of the FSM National Government that approximately 297 citizens are genuinely stranded on Guam, of whom 134 are residents of Pohnpei State, 120 are residents of Chuuk State, 13 are residents of Kosrae State, and 30 are residents of Yap State.