

EWC Coordinates Delegation to Observe Elections in Federated States of Micronesia



Olympia Morei, member of the Election Observation Mission from the Republic of Palau, watches as ballots are being prepared for tallying on Weno Island, Chuuk, FSM.

The Pacific Islands Development Program is the research arm and secretariat to the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders, an organization founded at the Center in 1980 composed of all 22 island governments in Oceania. PIDP also publishes a Web-based daily news service and engages in conflict management in the region.

The East-West Center's Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP) coordinated an international delegation to observe the national congressional and Chuuk state elections in the Federated States of Micronesia in March. "Despite the sensitive nature of having outside observers present for what in some cases were highly contested races, there was a remarkable air of openness and impressive hospitality extended to the groups visiting polling stations on Election Day," said Gerard Finin, PIDP's deputy director and the delegation project director.

An 18-member delegation of government officials, academics, and civil society representatives observed the elections at the invitation of the FSM national and Chuuk state governments. Headed by Congressman Eni F.H. Faleomavaega of American Samoa and chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, the Election Observation Mission included representatives from 10 countries, including Aotearoa (New Zealand), Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Palau, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and the United States.

After the election, the delegation issued a statement congratulating the people of the widely dispersed Pacific island nation "for an open and spirited electoral process, and for conducting an election that generated high voter interest and was free of violence within the FSM."

On Election Day, observers traveled to polling sites in three states: Chuuk, Pohnpei and Yap. Teams observed more than 50 polling stations in remote locations. Additionally, members of the mission observed the chain of transmission of the ballot boxes to centralized tabulation centers and witnessed the early tabulation process at various sites.

Election observer and EWC PhD student from Gujarat, India, Sakilahmed Makarani (left) interviews poll workers on Tol Island, Chuuk State, Federated States of Micronesia.



"This was an invaluable opportunity to observe the democratic process of a developing nation," remarked delegation member Robert Sullivan, a University of Hawai'i professor from New Zealand. There is no formal political party system in the FSM or Chuuk State. However, there are no constraints from the government to establish a party. "It seems that people in FSM and Chuuk State don't consider political parties as a prerequisite for democracy," noted Teguh Santosa, an EWC degree fellow from Indonesia. "The Chuukese and Micronesians tend to cast their political preferences based on personal relationships, clanship, and family-ties with the candidates... Nevertheless, the records show that the election turnout in the FSM and Chuuk State is quite high, around 80 percent."

The Election Observation Mission was conducted under the auspices of the Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership, a multilateral collaboration of Asia Pacific countries to promote and strengthen democratic processes in the region. The East-West Center coordinated the project through a grant from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. ♦

The election observation team members and institutional collaborators.

