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## **American Samoa joins Pacific Islands Forum as Associate Member**

American Samoa's application for Associate Member of the Pacific Islands Forum has been approved by forum leaders. The announcement came shortly after the Leaders Retreat held as part of this week's 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Tonga. It has been a busy week of bilateral discussions and presentations at the annual meeting of leaders from the organization's 18 member nations.

"After more than a decade as an observer, I am happy to announce that American Samoa has joined its brothers and sisters at the table of the Pacific Islands Forum," Honorable Governor Lemanu P. S. Mauga said.

The conversations that take place and decisions that are made at the Forum have far reaching effects across the Pacific. They affect our home and our people. This is why a seat at this table is so important to American Samoa.

As part of the Pacific family, we share common history, heritage, culture, and the beautiful blue Pacific we all call home. We also share the same concerns and face the same challenges for our future as our neighbors surrounding the table at PIF. As was a running theme for the Tonga meeting, when we are all in the vaka, together we can set course to a brighter future for all of the Pacific family. We look forward to contributing to this very important work," the Governor said. The Governor expressed his gratitude to the members of PIF who supported American Samoa's efforts to become Associate Members. "I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to each and every PIF Leader for their support of our application efforts. Throughout the process, we received so much counsel, positive feedback, and support from the Pacific family. Without this support, our elevation would not have been possible," the Governor said.

The elevation to Associate Member comes after significant efforts by Governor Lemanu and Honorable Lt. Governor La’apui Talauenga E. V. Ale, emphasizing the priority placed on this membership and its importance for the future of American Samoa. The Legislature of American Samoa signaled its support for the effort recently through Resolution passed by both the Senate and the House of Representatives in support of the effort to secure Associate Membership. In explaining the motivation for supporting the effort, the resolution says, “American Samoa has a historical connection to all regions of the Pacific. These ties hold American Samoa close to all of the Pacific Island nations. It allows our leaders to connect and understand each other on a level that only exists when there is a shared and mutual respect of a common culture. This shared history and culture motivates American Samoa’s desire to move from Observer status to Associate Membership to play a more active role in efforts to promote positive progress for the entire region.”

Acknowledging the work and support from local leaders, the Governor said, “The Lt. Governor’s leadership in this effort has been invaluable. He assembled a highly competent team of local leaders and specialists to work on this effort since the submission of our application last year. They have worked tirelessly to push these efforts forward. The support of the Fono for this effort demonstrates a solidarity of leadership to do what is best for the people of American Samoa.

Together we all work in service of the people of American Samoa. This membership will allow us to work with all the leaders of the Pacific to address our common challenges as part of the Blue Pacific Continent.”

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