

Address by H. E. David W. Panuelo

On the Occasion of the Medical Clearance of the Crew of the MV Chief Mailo

As Delivered

Facebook Link: <https://www.facebook.com/piofsm/videos/424243675556311/>

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My fellow Micronesians,

I have good news to share with you today. Here are the headlines: the COVID-19 case onboard the Chief Mailo is historical. The individual is not sick. The individual is not infectious. The FSM is asking the World Health Organization to designate us as COVID-19 free again, and we have received another shipment of COVID-19 vaccines through our Enduring Partnership with the United States of America. In this address, I will explain in detail all of this good news.

Yesterday, I received a joint report prepared by the FSM National Government and Pohnpei State Government medical teams that conducted the quarantine and isolation of the crew of the MV Chief Mailo. Allow me to share with you the report's main findings.

Number One: The medical teams adhered to FSM National, as well as Pohnpei State's, protocols to ensure that the COVID-19 virus does not reach our shores, and that the public is safe. All protocols and procedures were followed to the letter.

Number Two: Upon executing the quarantine and isolation protocols, the team administered the standard tests for COVID-19, in consultation with medical experts from our close friends and allies at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention and the World Health Organization.

Number Three: Based on the results of the antibody and antigen tests, the clinical presentation of the crew, including the one crew member who was tested positive through a nasal swab PCR test on January 7th, the history of the crew, and the history of the ship, the team concluded that the single positive case of COVID-19 onboard the Chief Mailo is historical, not sick, and not sick infectious, and does not pose any threat to the public for COVID-19.

Before I say Number Four, let me say Number Three again: the single positive case of COVID-19 onboard the Chief Mailo is historical. The person is not sick. The person is not infectious. The person and the crew do not pose any threat to the public for COVID-19.

Number Four: The FSM National Government is collaborating with the World Health Organization to remove the FSM from the official list of COVID-19 affected countries and territories.

Number Five: Pohnpei State is now ready to administer the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to the crew of the Chief Mailo.

Many of you are likely curious to know what will happen next to the crew and the ship. Because the crew have been cleared by both our National and State teams, the Government will be clearing them for disembarkation into the Federated States of Micronesia after their quarantine is completed. While I cannot give any specific date or timeframe, the ship is likely going to return to Chuuk State sometime in the coming weeks where it will drop off isolation units to strengthen Chuuk State Government's COVID-19 capacity.

My fellow Micronesians,

Our citizens stranded abroad are eager to know when they can return home. Something that we have learned over the course of this past month with the return of the Chief Mailo is that, while our frontline responders, and our procedures and protocols, are resilient, there remains a great deal of fear in the hearts of many of our citizens and decision-makers. I believe we can extinguish that fear by achieving herd immunity through our COVID-19 vaccination program.

I had been saying that we need to achieve a 100% vaccination rate for the FSM to make this happen. A 100% [vaccination] rate is still our Nation's overall target and objective, but per the sound medical advice we have received from the U.S. CDC and the WHO, an overall target of 70% to 80% will be our foundation for the repatriation of our citizens.

Yesterday, January 27th, and today, January 28th, we received an additional 9,800 doses of COVID-19 vaccine, delivered directly to our States of Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae. As of today, approximately 3,500 first doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been given across our Nation. Some States are moving faster than others. We learned on Tuesday, January 26th, for example that Chuuk State has given more than 1,500 doses, while Yap State had—as of that date—given just under 150. Our overall FSM vaccination rate so far is less than the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the

Republic of Palau, and any of the States in the U.S.—so this is an area where the rest of the FSM must look to the good example set by Chuuk, and speed up our vaccination rate.

Today, January 28th, is 28 days after December 31st, 2020. Later today I will receive my second and final dose of the COVID-19 vaccine which I will record on video in an effort to show you that it is safe.

Now that most frontline responders have received the vaccine, I am increasingly aware that citizens have a lot of questions about the COVID-19 vaccines, including how to get them. If you are a frontline responder, or if you are elderly, or if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or other diseases that are what the medical teams call “co-morbidities,” please contact your State’s Public Health office. They will help you to schedule your vaccination appointment. In the meantime, I have instructed our COVID-19 Task Force to develop materials based on the beautiful public awareness information coming out of the U.S. Territory of Guam, where we will disseminate Frequently Asked Questions and Answers in English, Yapese, Chuukese, Pohnpeian, and Kosraean so that citizens are equipped with the right knowledge.

My fellow Micronesians,

In a time of crisis, it can be tempting for some of us to distance ourselves from our identity as truly FSM citizens or Micronesians, withdrawing into making clear lines between an “us” and a “them.” Over the past several weeks, I have increasingly witnessed division in many forms. I have seen FSM citizens call for the ethnic Filipinos who are part of the crew of the Chief Mailo to go to the Philippines instead of staying in the FSM. I have seen FSM citizens in Pohnpei say that FSM citizens from Chuuk should not be welcome in Pohnpei, and I have seen FSM citizens in Chuuk say that FSM citizens in Pohnpei are prideful and discriminatory.

I ask each of us to remember that we are truly FSM citizens first, and that the FSM is a paradise in our backyards for each and every one of us. We travel under the FSM passport—there is no Yapese, Chuukese, Pohnpeian, or Kosraean passport—because we are one Micronesian people, united in peace and liberty. Every Micronesian can rightfully claim that every piece of Yap, every piece of Chuuk, every piece of Pohnpei, and every piece of Kosrae, is our Nation, and our country. We are all FSM citizens or Micronesians before we are Yapese, Chuukese, Pohnpeian, or Kosraean, and each Yapese, Chuukese, Pohnpeian, and Kosraean has the right to live and work in the State of their choice.

It is important that we share peace, friendship, cooperation, and love in our common humanity with each other as fellow Micronesians. The only way for us to extend these virtues with other countries is if we practice it fully on our own islands first.

My fellow Micronesians,

I have taken responsibility for the return of the MV Chief Mailo. I have taken responsibility for mandating a minimum vaccination rate of 70% for the repatriation of citizens stranded abroad. I now ask you all to take responsibility for protecting your health, and your family's health, by inquiring with your Public Health offices on how you can get the COVID-19 vaccine.

God Bless you and God Bless the Federated States of Micronesia. Kahlangan, and thank you.