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A Statement from the President Regarding the Recent Confirmation of Positive Cases of COVID-19 in Guam

March 15, 2020

My fellow Palauans and all residents:

As you may have heard, in past few hours the first case of COVID-19 has been confirmed in Guam. With COVID-19 cases confirmed so close to home, I understand and share in the anxiety that many of you are experiencing, the uncertainty about the consequences of the virus should it be detected here in Palau, and your concern for your loved ones living in countries with many cases of this virus.

First, let me reiterate, that there are currently NO suspected cases of COVID-19 in Palau. The health and safety of all Palauans is our foremost priority. I want to reassure you that the full resources of the national government are being used to respond to COVID-19. We are committed to continuing to provide transparent updates to the public in order to ensure that everyone can feel and be as safe as possible during this stressful period. This includes the daily situation reports from the Ministry of Health, which are available on its website. I urge you to refer to these reports for the most frequent updates and for verified information on the status of the global pandemic.

You can rest assured that the government has been preparing for this situation since the global spread of this virus first began to occur: we have been and will continue to work closely with our international partners, including the US Centers for Diseases Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization, to seek their expert advice and logistical support on responding to the threat of COVID19; the Ministry of Health has been preparing Belau National Hospital to receive and care for patients with severe cases of the virus; all inbound travelers continue to be are subject to screening for symptoms of infection; and a 24-hour hotline has been activated for public inquiries (488-0555).

In particular, we are liaising closely with the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control and will continue to refer suspected cases to their facilities for testing. As you all know, we have already had one suspected case of COVID-19 referred to the Taiwan CDC; this patient was tested and found not to have the virus. We can take comfort in knowing that we have the support of our friends in Taiwan, whose relative success in limiting the spread of COVID-19 is helping us shape our response.

I also want to reiterate what I said in my message last week about the importance of taking the measures that we can to prevent the spread of this virus and unnecessary panic. This includes not spreading unverified information, especially on social media. Unverified information, even if shared with the best of intentions, is dangerous. It weakens our overall response and public safety.



We need to remain calm, but vigilant, and avoid the temptation to share unverified and potentially misleading information. We should also continue to practice good hygiene. This includes regularly washing your hands with soap and water. Additionally, if you do begin to experience any symptoms, self-isolate yourself until you can see the doctor. We are also urging everyone to avoid non-essential travel overseas, and to exercise precautionary measures in large gatherings.

While no confirmed cases have been detected in Palau, global travel restrictions and other economic disruptions are resulting in substantial disruption to the local economy. As a small state, we are not immune to this. Those of you who work in our tourism industry have already been feeling these impacts, and we know that these will continue for some time. The government is working to approve measures to ease this burden of economic decline.

We ask all members of the public to continue with their regular shopping practices, and to avoid purchasing and hoarding goods beyond your normal needs. We are monitoring local markets to guard against price gouging, and will investigate reports of alleged profiteering.

My fellow Palauans and all residents, in preparing for any possible cases of COVID-19, we need to work together. This includes what the national government is able to do to ready our health system, the support of the Olbiil Era Kelulau (national congress) in approving new measures, and in community practices to reduce the risks of local transmission, as advised by the Ministry of Health.

All our provisions – in terms of travel regulations, health system preparedness, and economic measures – are continually under review, and will be appropriately revised as this global situation evolves.

We must look out for each other – not just ourselves, but for others, especially those who are the most vulnerable among us. I know that our strong communal bonds will provide us with a source of strength with which to weather this global storm.

Our thoughts and prayers are with our brothers and sisters in Guam and all around the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tommy H. Remengesau, Jr.", written over a white background.

Tommy H. Remengesau, Jr.
President of the Republic of Palau