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TELEPHONE: (202) 225-5021
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February 26, 2010

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Eni F.H. Faleomavaega
Chairman

The Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Dr. Lisa Williams (202) 225-8577

Washington, D.C.

**FALEOMAVAEGA SPEAKS TO CLINTON ABOUT
OBAMA INVITE TO AMERICAN SAMOA AND
DISCUSSES OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO
SUBCOMMITTEE**

The Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, Rep. Eni F.H. Faleomavaega, spoke to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton yesterday regarding his invitation to President Obama to visit American Samoa next month. Faleomavaega also raised other matters of concern related to the Subcommittee, thanking the Secretary for renewed engagement with the Pacific Islands and the re-establishment of USAID presence. Calling for support of Cambodia debt relief and increased funding for Agent Orange clean-up in Vietnam and UXO clearance operations in Laos, Faleomavaega also emphasized the importance of the U.S.-Kazakh relationship, recommending that the U.S. support Kazakhstan's initiative to host an OSCE summit and encouraging bilateral meetings between President Obama and President Nazarbayev during the global nuclear summit to be held in April of this year. Having renounced nuclear weapons and dismantled the world's 4th largest nuclear arsenal which was larger than the combined nuclear arsenals of Great Britain, France and China, Faleomavaega noted that no other country has a more legitimate voice than Kazakhstan when it comes to calling for a nuclear free-world.

Referring to President Obama's March trip to Guam, Indonesia and Australia, Faleomavaega informed the Secretary that he wrote to President Obama on February 2, 2010 and asked if he could stop in American Samoa, if his schedule permits, if only to refuel on his way back to Washington. "I think it would be the best way for the Commander-in-Chief to say thank you to the thousands of Samoan men and women who currently serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, especially since the Iraq war death rate per 1 million population is higher for American Samoa than any other State or Territory, as reported by *USA Today* which commended American Samoa for its outsized sacrifice," Faleomavaega said.

"No President has visited American Samoa since Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1967 and a visit by President Obama would give special meaning to this year's Flag Day Celebration as this April will mark the 110th year anniversary of the raising of the U.S. flag in American Samoa. A Presidential visit would also come in the midst of rebuilding after American Samoa was hit by the most powerful earthquake of 2009 on September 29 which set off a tsunami with waves that towered over 20 feet high and which resulted in deeply personal tragedies for numerous families and villages. In response to this disaster, President Obama was the first to promise full, swift and aggressive action to help American Samoa rebuild and recover. A stopover in American Samoa by the President at this time in the recovery process would go a long ways to show that under the Obama Administration's watch, residents of America will never suffer again like victims of Katrina did. Given what a Presidential visit would mean to the people of American Samoa at this time, I am hopeful that you will also do all you can to encourage the President to refuel in the Territory," Faleomavaega said.

In a written statement submitted for the record, Faleomavaega stated, "Two days ago, I had a conversation with your Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific and he mentioned that you are rescheduling your trip to Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea and that you may be considering a stopover in American Samoa. I can assure you that our people will extend to you the same warm welcome that they would extend to President Obama, and we would be honored by your visit. Your presence in the Territory would be historic and, on behalf of our people, I would like to personally extend an invitation to you to make a brief visit as American Samoa is well-positioned to be a regional leader and strengthen U.S.-Pacific Island relations."

During the hearing, Faleomavaega thanked Secretary Clinton for making progress on one of his long-sought goals, saying, "I thank you for moving forward on an initiative I have pursued for well more than a decade – returning USAID to the Pacific." In the 110th Congress, Faleomavaega's bill, H.R. 3062, which would have authorized appropriations for USAID in the Pacific, passed the House, but unfortunately was not taken up by the Senate. Secretary Clinton has since requested \$13 million for USAID programs for Pacific Island nations in FY 2011, including \$9.5 million for global climate change adaptation, \$2.5 million for HIV/AIDS programming in Papua New Guinea, and \$1 million for disaster management and mitigation in the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

In his written statement, Faleomavaega said that he is looking forward to next year's APEC Leaders Summit, which President Obama will host in Honolulu, and applauded the important speech Secretary Clinton gave at the East West Center in January on the Administration's views on a new 'regional architecture' for the Asia Pacific. As noted in that speech, the Administration is 'working to deepen our historic ties, build new partnerships, work with existing multilateral organizations to pursue shared interests, and reach beyond governments to engage directly with

people in every corner of this vast region. We start from a simple premise: America's future is linked to the future of the Asia-Pacific region; and the future of this region depends on America.'

As Assistant Secretary Campbell mentioned to Faleomavaega earlier this week, Secretary Clinton was going to deliver a similar speech focused exclusively on U.S. policy toward the Pacific Islands while in Papua New Guinea had she been able to visit if not for the tragedy in Haiti. In any case, Faleomavaega looks forward to that speech being rescheduled and hopes that it lays out 'a more comprehensive approach, American approach,' that the Secretary suggested when she testified before the Foreign Committee in April of last year.

In his official statement for yesterday's hearing, Faleomavaega thanked the Secretary for meeting leaders of the Pacific Island nations during the 2009 U.N. General Assembly, including representatives from all the Pacific Islands except Fiji – and the Fijian Permanent Representative was invited, but did not attend. The President of Nauru chaired the meeting, and some of the Island nations were represented by their leaders and others by their foreign ministers. In any case, the meeting provided an opportunity for Secretary Clinton to discuss issues critical to the Pacific Islands, express the U.S. commitment to the Pacific, and discuss plans for the reintroduction of USAID to the Pacific, the Pacific Partnership and other ship visits. Assistant Secretary Campbell mentioned that Secretary Clinton plans to hold annual summits with Pacific Island leaders, and the President plans to hold a summit with them on the sidelines of APEC next year.

"These commitments will do much to correct our unfortunate neglect of these important countries in recent years," Faleomavaega said. Faleomavaega thanked Secretary Clinton for all the support she showed the people of Samoa in the aftermath of the earthquake and the tsunami that struck American Samoa, Samoa and the Tongan Islands on September 29, 2009. "Your help was critical in cutting the red tape and allowing critical emergency donations from our Samoan and Tongan communities in the United States to be airlifted to Samoa. For your leadership and quick response I – and all Samoans – will always be grateful."

Faleomavaega concluded his remarks by commending Secretary Clinton for her leadership in the Asia Pacific and all around the world.

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