

Marshall Islands Chamber of Commerce

P.O. Box 1226 Majuro, MH 96960

Tel.: (692) 625-3177

Fax: (692) 625-3330

Email: Commerce@ntamar.net

Website: <http://www.MajuroChamber.net>

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 12, 2006

Marshall Islands Resort

Meeting called to order by President Jack Niedenthal at 12:01 P.M. Approximately 70 members and guests were in attendance. The next regular meeting will be on Tuesday, October 10, 2006.

- **Minutes** – approved electronically prior to meeting

- **Guests**
 1. Hon. Donald Capelle, Minister of Justice, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)
 2. S. Posesi Bloomfield, Attorney General, RMI
 3. Ladie Jack, Executive Councilman, Majuro Atoll Local Government (MALGOV)
 4. George Lanwi, National Police Commissioner
 5. Connie Terry, Sheriff, MALGOV
 6. Wedmon Langrine, National Police Major
 7. Elber Namna, Prosecutor, MALGOV
 8. Ablos Jelmak, National Police Captain
 9. Vincent Tani, National Police Captain
 10. Herson Aloka, National Police Captain
 11. Terry Paul, National Police Captain
 12. Dr. Tim O’Meara, ADB
 13. Saipan Chamber of Commerce executive introduced by Daniel Kramer

14. Helen-Claire Sievers, Director, World Teach, Boston, introduced by David Strauss

15. Food services consultant introduced by Colette Reimers

16. Bill Alexander, Rong Rong Resort partner, introduced by Kurt Pihno

- **Financial** – \$4574.39 balance in BOG
- **Chamber President’s Remarks**

Kommolol Anij kin ien in. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the Hon. Minister of Justice, Donald Capelle, Hon. Majuro Councilman Ladie Jack, Attorney-General S. Posesi Bloomfield, Police Commissioner George Lanwi, other national and local government officials, members of the Diplomatic Corps, the general public in attendance, and of course our Marshall Islands Chamber of Commerce membership.

It is fitting that today marks 5 years since the attack on the New York World Trade Center by terrorists in 2001. The terrorists were able to achieve what they did because the United States simply wasn’t ready for this kind of crime. In the RMI we don’t really have a terrorism problem per se, but I think we do have some serious public safety issues. To prevent crime in the RMI those of us living here need to stand ready: I think now is the time for us to define and to determine what this readiness entails. And when I say “we” I am not just talking about the national and local police departments or the Ministry of Justice. We all need to be ready: our local communities, our businesses, our employees, our families, and our neighbors.

With regard to the recent rape of the woman who teaches at CMI, which in a sense was a violent act of terrorism, I would like to quote a young Marshallese woman from the yokwe.net forums: She said, “It is sad how one person's stupidity can effect the entire country.” When I first read this it really troubled me. I didn’t believe it, or more accurately, maybe I didn’t want to believe it. But then some people started to say that maybe the Marshall Islands isn’t safe any more; comments which have led to others to remark that maybe the World teach and Dartmouth volunteer teaching programs shouldn’t be here and that perhaps the RMI is a risky place to do business. The woman on yokwe.net was absolutely correct: All of this negative publicity about the RMI came about because of the acts of one single person. But what that one person did was huge. It only took a handful of men to fly into the World Trade Center, but with that act those few men devastated the United States from coast to coast. It started everyone in the US thinking, What could we have done to prevent that act of terrorism? So in turn, I ask all of us here, what could we have done to prevent that heinous act of violence in Ajeltake? What could we have done to prepare ourselves against this kind of crime? What could we have done to protect those people—both Marshallese and foreigner--in Ajeltake? We have many policemen in this country, but that is not enough. The Chamber of Commerce believes we have to get more aggressive and we have to start watching out for ourselves and policing our own neighborhoods. Yes, the police need to stand ready, but we need to encourage our citizens to start locking their doors and windows at night and to

immediately report people when we see them acting in a way that potentially could be harmful to others.

The Chamber of Commerce also believes that it is not enough to voice our concerns over such public safety issues as sex crimes, gang violence, stray dogs, break-ins, drunk drivers, preventing the spread of AIDS, and other public safety issues. We want to talk about it with those who are directly responsible for preventing and dealing with these crimes in the RMI. And that is why we have invited the gentlemen you see here today: Not just so we can ask them questions, but also to figure out what we can do to support them and stand behind them in their efforts to make our society safer.

Thank you all again for coming today.

- **Guest Speaker** – Donald Capelle

Members of the Chamber, Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

First, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to meet and discuss the issue of Public Safety today. From the outset, we can all agree that the issue of Public Safety in the RMI is of vital importance to the Country and affects all of us.

Let me begin by saying that Public Safety in the RMI is not only the responsibility of the Government, or the Ministry of Justice, or the Police. It is something for which all sectors, all responsible and good citizens must play their part in. That is why meetings and this forum are important, and I trust some helpful and positive discussions will follow.

I wish to continue with some statistics. In the past year, we only have to go to court records to confirm that criminal prosecutions have increased significantly. For all of FY 2005 there were 47 criminal prosecution cases filed in the High Court. As of September 2006, with still three months to go, there are 83 cases being filed and prosecuted, representing an almost 100% increase in High Court cases filed. Of those, six are juvenile cases. Our courts have certainly been very active with more criminal trials, more jury trials, both in Majuro and Ebeye.

This increase can be attributed to many different factors. One factor certainly is a greater vigilance within the Ministry towards criminal prosecutions.

I note the very detailed questions sent by the Chamber. I think some of those questions can never be answered completely, but I will refer to some by way of this statement.

Juvenile crime is a problem. It always has been a problem, and as long as we have growing youth in this country, there will always be juvenile crime. The more important issues, is how we can reduce it, how we can provide better options than crime for juvenile offenders, and how the criminal justice system deals with them.

With regards to prison facilities, an improved facility is indeed a Ministry priority and we are in the process of seeking funding for it. The facility is in great need of improvement. Whether improving it has priority over other social needs in the RMI is not for me to assess.

With regards to the truancy question, there are indeed curfew laws which prohibit any person under the age of 18 from being on the streets or at a public place between 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM unless they are married, accompanied by an adult, attending a sports, church or community event, or on an urgent errand. Whether this law should be enforced most strictly is also a social and community based question.

With regards to the crime and employment question, there are many studies all over the world indicating joblessness as one of the reasons why people, particularly youth, commit crimes. It is very important that we create jobs and futures for our youth, and stimulate an economy that can sustain job creation. This is a Government and national priority, and it should be a priority for all sectors of society.

As to the question of funding, there will always be funding to maintain all Government services, including public safety. A rise in crime will require a rise in funding. What we have to stress is that those funds are used in the most effective and responsible way. Public safety should not be compared as a priority to other services such as education, health, and private sector growth. Rather, public safety should be seen as a prerequisite and requirement for all those other services to improve.

Once again, I thank you for this opportunity and wish us all a useful and productive meeting today.

Komol Tata.

- **Guest Speaker** – Ben Graham, Chamber member. [Secretary’s note: Ben’s complete PowerPoint presentation as a “pdf” file is attached to these minutes]

Is there “Trouble Ahead?” There are urban delinquency, crime and social problems in the Marshall Islands. The following issues identified here contribute to these problems:

- Rising poverty
- Rising unemployment – youth unemployment is 63%
- High income inequality – loss of wages compared to price increases
- People lacking opportunity
- Falling real wages and income
- Growing substance abuse – alcohol abuse
- Poor school performance – one of the highest dropout rates in the Pacific
- Growing demographic crises –males ages 15 – 29 not employed or in school

The biggest problem today is that the negative, statistical trends are not sustainable at a time when fact based realities aren’t being acknowledged. You can’t

begin to solve problems if you don't admit that they exist. The solution is to improve social, economic, and human development and management.

- **Questions from the floor**

Q. Dr. Tim O'Meara. How many policemen are there?

A. Ladie Jack. There are 88 MALGOV police 21 of which are in Laura. We have six vehicles three of which are operational. We have two patrol boats one of which is operational. We have a curfew unit. We maintain three shifts a day seven days a week.

A. National Police. There are 162 national police that includes Majuro, Ebeye, and Sea Force. We plan to increase that number for Wotje.

Q. Don Hess. What is the conviction rate?

A. S. Poesi Bloomfield. There have been two acquittals this year. The rest are convictions or other dispositions by the court.

Q. Carlos Domnick. Are there any collective efforts? Churches? Traditional leaders?

Q. Nicole. Some of the movies that are being shown here are disturbing and would never be permitted on Australian T.V. for their violent and sexually explicit content. I almost didn't return to the Marshall Islands after I heard that a good friend of mine had been raped. I was attacked here in my home three years ago. This is hard for me to relate. Even though the perpetrator was pointed out to the national police, he wasn't arrested. Even though I filed a complaint in writing, it was claimed that I hadn't. The perpetrator's family removed him from Majuro and took him to an outer island. When I asked why the national police hadn't gone to this outer island to arrest the perpetrator I was told that there wasn't enough money to buy a ticket on Air Marshall Islands. What has changed?

A. Donald Capelle. We'll look into this matter.

Q. Kenneth Kramer. Who do we call – national or local?

A. National Police. Dial 911 to reach the National Police.

A. MALGOV. Dial 8999 to reach Local Police.

Q. Wilson Hess. I'd like to congratulate Nicole for bravely telling her story. Attacks against women should generate local outrage. In our recent case, the police performed well. I'd like to offer the National Police CMI's assistance. What can we do?

Q. Helen-Claire Sievers. I've come here from Boston to find out what is happening. There are 1,500 World Teach volunteers in 12 countries, and the Marshall Islands is the only country where our volunteers have been attacked. Are we criminally liable for sending our volunteers here now?

Q. Bill Weza. There's a career thief that has been regularly committing burglary at the Marshall Islands Resort. He has been arrested many times. The problem is that there is no deterrent. There is no effective punishment.

Q. Kurt Pinho. Will a juvenile be prosecuted as an adult? If so, will he be placed with adult offenders in the jail? I just returned from Rong Rong with a 12 year-old boy on my boat that had a rooster. He appeared near my house, and my daughter's jewelry was gone. The former mayor of Majuro called me to say that this boy stole his rooster.

Q. Ben Chutaro. What kind of a message are we delivering to criminals with our present work release program? Who has the authority to do this?

A. S. Posesi Bloomfield. The jailer has the authority.

A. Donald Capelle. This is approved by the court.

Q. Michael Jenkins. Our jail is not humane. Because of this we cannot prohibit work release under our Constitution. The Marshall Islands has development, so we have these kinds of problems. There has always been infanticide. The justice system is overwhelmed. The cause of crime is low self-esteem combined with high stress. Punishment doesn't positively affect these two causes of crime. Rehabilitation and recovery is the answer.

Q. Ben Chutaro. We have to protect the public.

Q. David Strauss. What about the stray dogs who bite people and the stray pigs who destroy property?

A. S. Posesi Bloomfield. We are considering the adoption of what a neighboring country does where the police will have the ability to go and shoot a dog after the report of the dog bite. There is nothing about the pigs.

A. National Police. We have no facilities to use to lock up dogs. If we kill the dogs we now have a problem with EPA if we throw the dogs in the dump.

Q. Jack Niedenthal. What will the new prison look like?

A. Donald Capelle. First we will improve the existing facility to have separate rooms for males, female, and juveniles. Then in 2007 the new prison would have 60 – 70 rooms.

Q. Sam Smith. Are only tourists being bitten by dogs?

Q. Jack Niedenthal. No, there are lots of bites.

Q. Kenneth Kramer. The President and traditional leaders should inform all citizens of the importance of public safety.

Q. Former Dartmouth director. It's difficult to report crimes here because people can't leave as easily as foreigners. How can people have enough faith in justice to report crimes?

Q. Roger Cooper. Are there any programs established for prisoner rehabilitation?

Q. David Strauss. Two people died in the Majuro hospital from HIV. Should the public be protected from HIV?

Q. Giff Johnson. It is important how people perceive the police. To increase public confidence in the police, the police should take internal violations more seriously. For example there is the recent incident where an off duty policeman interfered with an on duty policeman.

A. Donald Capelle. They didn't file a police report. Now that we know, we will follow-up. Majuro and Ebeye do their own internal investigations.

Q. Ben Chutaro. I'd like to request that the government follow the requirements of the Administrative Procedures Act to compile all laws, regulations, and make these available to citizens.

Q. Scott Stege. Children need to see more of the police to learn respect for the police.

Q. Ben Graham. What can we do to assist in public safety?

Q. Hirobo Obeketang. Marshall Islands Resort is increasing its security staff.

Q. Jack Niedenthal.. What can we do?

A. Donald Capelle. This was a helpful dialog. It's been an opportunity to work with the community. We will look into the allegations. Perhaps a small committee can be designated to assist us. I look forward to doing this again.

Q. Helen Reed-Rowe. I would like to thank the Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry of Justice for this seminar.

Q. WUTMI representative. We need more support from government to be able to air women's issues on V7AB radio.

Q. David Strauss. The government purportedly has a lease on the land across the street from Payless by the Weather Station until 2007. Why not develop that land into an area for children to use?

Q. Scott Stege. I've been informed that there will be new regulations regarding the airing of programs on V7AB.

- **Committee Reports - None**

- **Old Business** – None
- **New Business**

The Executive Committee (EC) has revised the Chamber's bylaws and circulated a copy of the revision to all members. The original bylaws will now be circulated so that Chamber members can approve the revised bylaws at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 2:30 PM.

Minutes prepared by:

Jim McLean

Approved _____

Approved with Corrections _____