

Marshall Islands Chamber of Commerce

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Meeting Minutes

Friday, April 24, 2009

Marshall Islands Resort

Meeting called to order by President Hirobo Obeketang at 12:15 P.M. Approximately 50 members and guests were in attendance. The next regular meeting will be on Friday, May 15, 2009, unless changed to accommodate a special program or guest speaker 's schedule.

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

- **Guests**

- Bruce J. D. Linghu, Taiwan Ambassador
- Doug Morris, US Deputy Chief of Mission
- Steven S. C. Hsu, Third Secretary, Taiwan Embassy
- Attorney Pevec, Enewetak Local Government
- Adam Mitchell, Political and Economic Officer, US Embassy
- James T. Barry, FBI Special Agent, Saipan
- RRE Consultant

- **Chamber President's opening remarks**

Welcome to the April Chamber of Commerce meeting. Today's program will be presented by the US Embassy's Adam Mitchell. He will introduce and screen a 50 minute video entitled "Illicit - The Dark Trade."

- **Adam Mitchell Presentation**

I was asked to briefly discuss the protection of intellectual property rights. Many countries including the United States have laws that protect intellectual property. In most cases, this involves protecting trademarks, patents, and copyrights. In concept, this means the protection of intangible things.

A trademark protects titles and brand names. A copyright protects a sequence of words as can be found in songs, software, and books. A patent protects devices. Other than the moral imperative to not steal the work of others, why should we care about this subject?

When people have a chance to exclusively profit from an invention or idea, they have an incentive to invent and create. After they have enjoyed an exclusive profit for a number of years, others can then profit from the invention or idea. This creates economic development.

The Marshall Islands has fully exploited its physical resources. But it has yet to effectively exploit its human resources – its people. One way to exploit human potential is to protect any intellectual property that is created.

The Marshall Islands has a limited intellectual property law that only protects local recording artists. It does not protect the intellectual property of other people. When the underwater fiber optic cable becomes available next year, the Marshall Islands will enjoy a serious potential for economic growth through electronic commerce. In order to fully exploit this, it will be necessary to extend intellectual property protection to trading partners as well as expanding the protection of local intellectual property.

Secretary's note: Marshallese people now routinely write books, poems, and songs; paint paintings; write computer software; create unique handicrafts; fashion unique devices; and record music. Currently and under Marshall Islands law, of these creative efforts only the music is protected. Beginning next year, all of these creative efforts and new efforts not yet identified will become easily marketable internationally.

- **National Geographic video entitled "Illicit - The Dark Trade."**

Discussion following the video:

Q. If recording artists and software publishers know that the Marshall Islands doesn't protect their intellectual property, why would they allow their products to be shipped to the Marshall Islands?

A. They may not know. But with the advent of real broadband access next year, we can be assured that they will find out.

Permitting the purchase and sale of pirated intellectual property establishes a network for the transport of illegal goods. Once that network is established, other forms of illicit trade can and will use that same network. This can include fake and potentially harmful pharmaceuticals, mock designer labels, drugs, and even human trafficking. As the use of these networks increases, bribery and official corruption occurs even to the extent of compromising small countries. Criminals control illegal goods and exploit people to ply this trade.

Q. What does the Ministry of Health do to check the legitimacy of its drugs?

A. The Chamber Secretary will ask.

- **New business**

Denise deBrum was introduced as a visiting local student currently attending a university in New Zealand.

Meeting adjourned at 1:15 PM.

Minutes prepared by:

Jim McLean