



**OBIS RA RUBEKUL BELAU**

*Office of the Council of Chiefs*

P.O. Box 1257, Koror, Republic of Palau 96940

Tel: (680) 488-3350 Fax: (680) 488-3846

E-mail: [council.of.chiefs@palaunet.com](mailto:council.of.chiefs@palaunet.com)

**REKLAI Raphael B. Ngirmang**

WELCOMING REMARKS  
U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting  
Koror, Palau  
4-7 November 2005

President Remengesau Jr.,  
Members of OEK who are among us  
U.S. Charge de Affairs, Kingsland

Ng Kmal Ungil Tutau!!

It is a great honor to welcome the distinguished Co-Chairs and the hard-working members of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force to Palau. It is also my great pleasure to welcome back Charles Chieng, a fellow traditional leader from Yap and my brothers and sisters from Micronesia and Polynesia. You have all come from great distances and we appreciate your visit to our islands.

In welcoming you to our shores, I would also like to acknowledge the U.S. government and its agencies and especially yourselves who have worked diligently to protect our coral reef systems. I thank you, also, my fellow islanders for being vigilant in keeping our island life and cultures alive and for keeping our traditional knowledge and stewardship responsibilities in place.

I thank you also for sharing that valuable knowledge and wisdom with “outsiders” so that we may find collective solutions to ever increasing threats that continue to bombard our islands coral reefs.

Arranging to have your meeting in Palau must have been a logistical nightmare and a costly exercise. But I know the result will go a long way to bring in a new era of better understanding, stronger cooperation and closer partnership among our peoples, experts and managers. That itself is a very important first step toward achieving successful ventures and I thank you for taking that bold step.

I cannot over-state the importance of healthy coral reef systems for island peoples. First, they produce healthy and wholesome food for locals and guests alike. Second, they have become important source of cash from developing tourist industries. Third, they provide living classrooms and training grounds for our young people. And they are just so darn beautiful and intriguing!

However, we, the traditional stewards have become heavily burdened by increasing pressures and new threats, which we are unable to deflect by ourselves and by traditional means alone. We need new partners and new ways to work on these new problems.

That is why in 1999 in Palau, we began the first Micronesian Traditional Leaders Conference as a forum to share knowledge and support each other in understanding and dealing with these new issues. Since then, we have met in Pohnpei and more recently in Yap where we’ve had fruitful exchange.

Your meeting here fits perfectly with that concept and we look forward to hearing about your efforts and successes, and hopefully to have them shared at the next Traditional Leaders Conference.

A topic that is closer to my heart is a vision for a sustainable economy and livelihood for my people on Babeldaob. One that does not undermine the integrity of our surrounding coral reefs. We will need all the help we can in planning for this and I welcome any advise you wish to provide on your own time and as you see fit.

Meanwhile, I understand your program allows for the opportunity to visit our island home and people. Please take the time out for a visit and include a drive to Babeldaob to see forests, streams and waterfalls, and villages. Only then will you understand and appreciate the amount of efforts that have been invested and will continue to be needed in maintaining its bounties and beauty.

Once again, I wish you a very warm welcome, especially, from the traditional leaders of Palau and please enjoy your stay and have a successful meeting.

Ko Kmal Mesulang.