

Participation of Independent U.S. Territories and Freely Associated States' Border Organizations in the Pacific Island Immigration Conference and the Oceanic Customs Organization

The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) recently started participating as observers in the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC) and will begin participating in the Oceanic Customs Organization (OCO) Conference in 2010 also as an observer. The PIDC and OCO are apolitical, voluntary, technical organizations focused on regional immigration and customs matters respectively. PIDC and OCO membership is open to the immigration and customs organizations of independent countries and territories within Oceania. Each has secretariat supported and staffed by the membership. CBP encourages the independent customs and immigration organizations of its territories and those of the Freely Associated States (i.e., The Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands) to participate or to continue to participate in these two regional forums. CBP views these two forums as key potential points of communication, collaboration and information sharing on matters pertaining to regional immigration and customs issues and concerns.

The US Customs and Border Protection is responsible for determining the eligibility of goods and people into the United States and its territories. Some territories in the Pacific however maintain independent customs and immigration organizations. Guam maintains an independent customs organization as does the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa. American Samoa also maintains an independent immigration organization. These independent border organizations execute the customs and immigration laws and regulations as determined by the governments of those islands.

The PIDC is a forum for the official immigration agencies of the Pacific region. It was established in 1996 and has as its principal objective to promote consultation and cooperation among immigration agencies within the Pacific region. The conference also provides for the exchange of ideas, the dissemination of information and the provision of technical assistance. The OCO is similar in scope and purpose for customs issues with its membership being made up of the customs agencies within the Pacific region. Both organizations' secretariats are based in Suva, Fiji, with each year's annual conference held in a different member's country.

The PIDC and OCO are the only two apolitical, regional forums for immigration and customs matters in Oceania and are supported by strong and capable secretariats. CBP believes these two organizations to be not only supportive of a regional dialog on immigration and customs issues but also a key regional platform around which strong bilateral relationships can be also be developed.

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