

Pacific Forum Successfully Concludes Cross-Border Cooperation Workshop Series on WPS & Maritime Environmental Crimes in the Coral Triangle



Honolulu, 02/16/2024 – In cooperation with U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), the Pacific Forum concluded its virtual workshop, "Cross-Border Cooperation on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) & Maritime Environmental Crimes in the Coral Triangle," held on February 6-7, 2024 (Asia time). Stakeholders from three countries in the heart of the Coral Triangle reviewed and strategized gender-sensitive responses to maritime environmental security threats, such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; marine pollution including plastics; illegal extraction, dredging, and looting of marine environments; human trafficking; destructive fishing; and tourism.

The aim of this workshop was to foster cross-border cooperation among the maritime law enforcement agencies and women's civil society organizations of Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Papua New Guinea. Amalia Hilliard, WPS Program Integrator for the USINDOPACOM, stated, "By integrating WPS principles into maritime law enforcement, we can enhance the security and well-being of the Coral Triangle and its communities." Civil society speakers noted that women face many threats within the maritime economy, such as low or non-existent wages due to gender discrimination; sexual harassment and assault; and loss of livelihoods due to IUU fishing in their waters.

Many local experts spoke about their experiences and the solutions they have developed to tackle maritime environmental threats in their communities, including Ms. Leilani Gallardo (Coral Triangle Center, Indonesia), Ms. Jeanny Sirait (Destructive Fishing Watch, Indonesia), Pedro Rodrigues (Marine Resources Management, Timor-Leste), Ms. Yolarnie Amepou and Ms. Joyce Mavera (Piku Biodiversity Network, PNG), and Maj. Anthony Mota (Papua New Guinea Defense Force).

The health and security of the Coral Triangle, home to over 550 unique coral species, is vital to the food, health, and economic security of more than 130 million people. Yet the Coral Triangle faces increasing maritime environmental threats. Experts provided crucial insights into the effect of maritime environmental insecurity on community stability, for both women and men. As one civil society member explained, when the local economy is weak, men sometimes resort to engaging in maritime crimes such as illegal fishing or smuggling of marine goods; and if they are caught, their whole family suffers due to loss of household income. The health of the blue economy and strength of law enforcement is therefore crucial to a community's overall security.

The workshop addressed the importance of building the capacity of maritime law enforcement agencies to tackle these crimes, emphasizing the often-overlooked gender perspective that is necessary for fully understanding the security challenges faced on the ground and in the water. The event concluded with excitement for continued collaboration in the upcoming hybrid virtual / in-person gathering which will take place in late April 2024 in Indonesia.

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About Pacific Forum:

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USINDOPACOM's Office of Women, Peace & Security (WPS) mainstreams gender perspectives into theater plans, programs, and policies in order to enable the USINDOPACOM enterprise to develop inclusive security strategies that advance a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

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