

Micronesian Delegation's Courtesy Visit to Iwaki

On the 8th and 9th of March in 2016, delegates from the Micronesian Embassy in Japan and the Micronesian Congress visited Iwaki, touring a variety of facilities including local primary schools as well as observing reconstruction works in disaster areas. The delegates also briefly met with the Mayor of Iwaki City and expressed their impressions of the city as well as their thoughts on Iwaki's reconstruction efforts. The delegates included: Wesley Simina, Speaker; Berney Martin, Vice-Speaker; Esmond Moses, Congress Member and Lam Dang, Legislative Counsel for the Federated States of Micronesia; as well as H.E John Fritz, Ambassador and Kunio Suenaga, Economic Attaché for the Embassy of the Federated States of Micronesia in Japan.



Great East Japan Earthquake Exhibition, Iwaki La La Mew

The delegates first visited the Great East Japan Earthquake Exhibition at La La Mew where they learnt more about the extent of damage Iwaki received during the 2011 disaster and also what life was like in evacuation shelters. They also observed a display outlining Iwaki's offshore wind farm experiments and learnt how Iwaki is making efforts to advance renewable energy.

Usuiso District Reconstruction Area

Following La La Mew, the delegates visited Usuiso District, which was one of the worst-hit areas in Iwaki from the 2011 tsunami. The delegates were not only able to see first-hand the terrible extent of damage from the disaster, but were also able to hear about the reconstruction efforts that have taken place until now and the planned completion of current reconstruction efforts taking place in the area such as the completion of a 7.2m high sea wall as well as a 10.2m high and 50m wide "green zone" to help protect citizens from future tsunamis.



A brief visit to the nearby Shioyazaki Lighthouse concluded the first day of the program.

Shiramizu Amidado Temple

The second day of the program began with a brief trip to Iwaki's National Treasure, Shiramizu Amidado Temple, where the delegates were able to see inside Iwaki's oldest standing structure (built over 800 years ago during the late Heian period) and talk with the chief priest of the temple about its origins and history.



Fujiwara Primary School

One of the main highlights of the second day was the visit to one of Iwaki's local primary schools. The delegates were not only able to observe Japanese classrooms, but also ate Japanese-style school lunch (kyushoku) with the children and taught them more about Micronesia. The children were very enthusiastic to eat lunch with the guests and asked many questions about Micronesia, including the local languages and differences between Micronesian and Japanese education.

Elem

Elem is an experience-based economic education facility for primary school and junior high school students to teach them about economic independence and working life. It was built in 2014 thanks to financial support from the Qatar Friendship Fund. The delegates had a brief opportunity to see inside this interactive learning facility before making a courtesy visit to the Mayor of Iwaki City.



Courtesy Visit with the Mayor and Chairperson of Iwaki City Assembly

Speaker Wesley Simina alongside the other guests also had the opportunity to briefly meet and converse with Toshio Shimizu, the Mayor of Iwaki City as well as Nemoto Shigeru, Chairperson of Iwaki City Assembly. The Mayor and Chairperson warmly welcomed the delegates and Speaker Simina, on behalf of the Micronesian guests, expressed his gratitude for being invited to visit Iwaki. He also mentioned how impressed he was at Iwaki's progress in recovering from the disaster, and in regards to the coastal sea walls, he added that, although it may change the landscape of the beach, protecting people's lives was very important and showed his support for the ongoing recovery efforts.

Fukushima National College of Technology (Fukushima Kosen)

The final leg of the Micronesian delegation's tour was at Fukushima National College of Technology (Fukushima Kosen). After receiving a brief introduction about the college from the vice-principal, the delegates were guided around some of the college facilities, including a renewable energy hub and a metalwork's workshop, before hearing a presentation in English from some of the students.

It has been just over twelve months since Iwaki held the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM 7), and with the recent Micronesian visit - in addition to the opening of the Embassy of the Independent State of Samoa's Honorary Consulate in Fukushima - there are positive signs that Iwaki is further building on its international exchanges in the future.



The Micronesian delegation members from left to right: H.E John Fritz, Lam Dang, Speaker Wesley Simina, Esmond Moses and Vice-Speaker Berney Martin