The Asia Pacific First Ladies Summit 2019 – Palau successfully concluded a series of three high-profile events, Dec. 9-11, 2019, in Koror, Palau. Each of the three components—the Summit, the Interfaith Family Festival, and the International Youth Assembly—was unprecedented and uniquely successful.

The Summit on December 10 had the theme, “Addressing the Critical Challenges of Our Time: Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity and Universal Values.” Five current First Ladies (Palau, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Mariana Islands) along with three former First Ladies (Fiji, Kiribati and Marshall Islands) attended. In addition, over 500 delegates from 38 nations were at the Ngarachamayong Cultural Center for the Summit.

During the inaugural session, the International Association of First Ladies for Peace was launched. Although First Ladies (and First Gentlemen), do not have legal positions in government, they nonetheless, have tremendous power and influence. Not only because of their relationship with their spouse, but equally important because of their connection to the grass roots of society. They interact more easily and freely with people, and thus, feel the pulse of the nation on political and cultural issues.

In the afternoon there were two sessions, respectively entitled, “The Role of Women Leaders in Addressing the Critical Challenges: Solutions and Best Practices” followed by, “Palau: Preserving the Environment through Cultural Wisdom.”

The next morning, Dec. 11, in the same venue the Interfaith Family Festival was held. This was a solemn ceremony where couples from various religious traditions rededicated their love to each other and at the end of the event two young students pledged to be filial children by honoring their parents. On stage were the current head of state couple, the President of Palau, H.E. Tommy Remengesau, and First Lady, Madam Debbie Remengesau, along with other First Ladies and international dignitaries. Many were in tears, including the First Lady of Palau, as they witnessed the sincerity of the couples recommitting themselves to each other and the children reciting the Pledge of Filial Piety.

In the afternoon, Youth and Students for Peace (YSP) held an International Youth Assembly. Additional chairs had to be brought in the hall as 680 students from 14 public and private educational institutions, representing nearly 30 percent of all the students in Palau, held one of the largest intra-school assemblies ever held in the history of the island republic. The Ministry of Education completely supported this educational, entertaining, and life-changing event where students took the Pledge of Filial Piety. It was light, bright and exciting.

For nearly two months prior to the Youth Assembly, international students from YSP along with local students held a number of programs in schools and communities in Palau, including: character education and drug prevention programs, community service projects, martial arts training, public speaking instruction and intra-school competition, liaison officer selection and training, offering scholarships, and a 2-day youth camp on Coco Beach in the northern part of the island.

The first Asia Pacific Summit was held in Kathmandu, Nepal at the end of 2018 were seven current Heads of State and Government attended from: Nepal, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nauru,
Samoa, Tuvalu and Philippines. One month prior to the First Ladies Summit in Palau, UPF organized the second Asia Pacific Summit in Cambodia, November 2019. This Summit was hosted by H.E. Hun Sen at the Prime Ministers’ office, the “Peace Palace,” in Phnom Penh.

Attending the Summit in Cambodia were H.E. Raynold Oilouch, Vice-President, Republic of Palau, and First Lady, Madam Debbie Remengesau, along with the Vice-President of Myanmar, the Speaker and Deputy Speaker from Bangladesh and Pakistan, respectively, a Nobel Laureate, and nine former Heads of State and Government.

The First Lady and the Office of the President of the Republic of Palau jointly co-hosted the Asia Pacific First Ladies Summit along with the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), and the Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP). Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon co-founded UPF and WFP, along with her late husband, the Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon. Mother Moon, as she is lovingly called, was unable to attend the Palau event because of her schedule in Africa. Instead, she sent her two daughters-in-law, Prof. Yeon Ah Moon and Dr. Julia Moon on her behalf.