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**CONTACT:**

Gallego: Jacques Petit | [jacques.petit@mail.house.gov](mailto:jacques.petit@mail.house.gov) | (202) 225-4065

Case: Nestor Garcia | [nestor.garcia@mail.house.gov](mailto:nestor.garcia@mail.house.gov) | (202) 945-7189

## **JOINT STATEMENT: Gallego and Case on Congressional Delegation to Pacific Islands Countries**

**PALAU** – **Congressman Ruben Gallego (D-AZ)**, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Intelligence and Special Operations of the House Armed Services Committee, joined by **Congressman Ed Case (D-HI)**, Co-Chair of the Pacific Island Caucus and member of the House Committee on Appropriations, led a bipartisan delegation of lawmakers to key Pacific Islands countries this week to meet with allies and partners in the region, to include key military and civilian leaders, and senior members of the U.S. diplomatic corps.

Congressmen Gallego and Case were joined in the delegation by:

- House Veterans Affairs Committee **Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA)**,
- **Congressman Juan Vargas (D-CA)**, member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and
- **Representative Amata Radewagen (R-AS)**, member of the House Natural Resource Committee.

In the **Philippines**, the delegation met with senior officials including Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana and the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to the Philippines Heather Variava. It also travelled to Fort Magsaysay in Luzon and Zamboanga City in Mindanao to visit with leaders of the Philippine Armed Forces and members of the U.S. military.

In **Papua New Guinea**, the delegation met with Prime Minister James Marape, Chief of Defense Force Major General Goina, former Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor, and U.S. Ambassador to Papua New Guinea Erin McKee, to discuss efforts to enhance the relationship between Papua New Guinea and the United States to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

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In **Palau**, the delegation participated in the international Our Oceans Conference focused on safeguarding our world's oceans, and met with President of Palau Surangel Whipps Jr., former U.S. Secretary of State and current Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry, U.S. Ambassador to Palau John Hennessy-Niland, and other key leaders from throughout the Pacific. Subjects ranged from the existential threat of climate change to the Pacific Islands to the growing presence of China in the Pacific and renewal of the Compacts of Free Association.

**Joint statement from Congressmen Ruben Gallego and Ed Case:**

“As the atrocities in Ukraine and attack on democracy everywhere by Russian President Vladimir Putin expand, the world is watching closely how the United States and our partners and allies respond to ensure the continuation of the international rules-based order that has ensured peace and property throughout the globe for generations. In these times of crisis, it is even more critical than ever that we foster, strengthen, and expand our democratic alliances around the world through our shared values, interests, and goals. Nowhere are those relationships more important than throughout the Indo-Pacific, where we all face the challenge of China and where we must continue to assist with the environmental, developmental, security and other challenges of the region and its partner countries.

“The strong bond between the U.S. and the Philippines was readily apparent on this visit, and we remain committed to strengthening this critical treaty alliance with investments to ensure interoperability and resilience as we work with the Philippines on a range of issues, such as maritime security, humanitarian-assistance, and disaster-relief. We also have opportunities to better fulfill our promises by helping the Department of Veterans Affairs Manila Regional Benefit Office and Manila Outpatient Clinic assist U.S. veterans living in the Philippines.

“Our shared history with Papua New Guinea provides both countries with opportunities we can further build upon in the coming years. Key to these efforts is mutual investment into the recently agreed-upon ten-year strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability, which will engage civic partners on an integrated approach to prevent conflict, promote resilience and stability, and advance economic development.

“Our visit to Palau only reinforced the leadership of our Compact and other Pacific Islands partners on a range of issues, especially reversing the degradation of our world's precious oceans. We also confirmed our commitment to a fair and expedited renewal of the Compacts of Free Association.

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“Overall, at each meeting the delegation conveyed our full support for strengthening, alongside our partners, collective regional capabilities to prepare for and respond to geopolitical challenges, natural disasters, biological threats, and more to assure freedom of navigation and other foundations of our international rules-based order, and to build technical resilience and interoperability.”

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