

Pacific Islands Committee

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2021



A Word from the Chair

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that the Pacific Islands are significantly more digitally connected than they were a decade ago. Digital advances and internet access have changed the accessibility landscape. Instead of jettisoning training, technology has made it possible for the Pacific Islands to continue judicial and court administrator education throughout the past 14 months of worldwide sheltering. Soon, the Pacific Islands Judicial Education Program will have its own website that will be hosted in Guam, ensuring island-wide accessibility to the information from the education programs.



Hon. M. Margaret McKeown, Circuit Judge, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals

The Ninth Circuit's Pacific Islands Committee has continued to support the island courts with several virtual trainings. Since travel was at a standstill, nationally and internationally-recognized experts engaged in virtual webinars for judges and court staff. The Simon Sinek group's four-part training on leadership had more than 150 participants. The committee and the Pacific Judicial Council partnered with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to provide a two-day training on elder abuse and developed training sessions for court clerks using experts from the Guam judiciary and the Guam District Court. With the growing success of the virtual seminars, we partnered with

JUSTICE PROFILE

Associate Judge Teresa K. Kim-Tenorio Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

Author: Hon. Michael W. Mosman, District Judge, Oregon

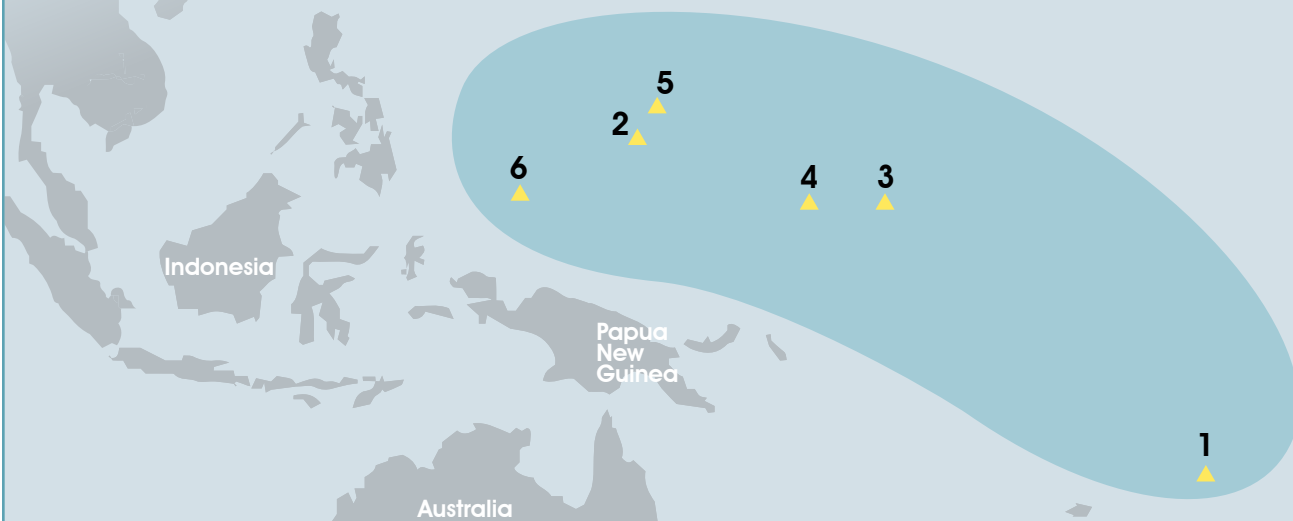
It's a cliché to start a story with the phrase "it was a dark and stormy night." It may not have been nighttime, but it was a storm that brought Judge Teresa K. Kim-Tenorio to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Typhoon Pamela struck Guam in 1976. At that time Judge Kim-Tenorio was a two-year-old toddler living with her family in Seoul, Korea. Her father's background included telecommunications, and he was hired to go to Guam, and later Saipan, to restore telephone lines. He fell in love with the islands and, in 1978, the family moved to the CNMI. Their early years included living in Tinian and Rota, ultimately settling in Saipan.



An Overview of the Pacific Islands

The Pacific Islands Committee assists the local judiciaries in six governmental entities. Guam and American Samoa have existed as United States territories for more than a century. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the republics of Palau and the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia were previously parts of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands established by the United Nations after World War II. The U.S. administered the trust until 1986, when Palau, the Marshall Islands and Micronesia attained their independence through a Compact of Free Association. Rather than independence, the Northern Mariana Islands established a

political union with the U.S. while remaining self-governing with locally-elected political leaders. Legal systems in some of the islands are a mix of common law and customary law and sometimes use U.S. law as guidance. All of the islands have local court systems. The Northern Mariana Islands and the “organized” territory of Guam also have federal courts, while the “unorganized” territory of American Samoa has a high court whose chief justice and associate chief justice are appointed by the secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior. ●



1. American Samoa (South Pacific)



U.S. territory since 1900
Highest local court:
High Court of American Samoa
*Population: 43,366

2. Guam (North Pacific)



U.S. territory since 1898
Highest local court: Supreme Court of Guam
*Population: 168,801

3. Republic of the Marshall Islands



Attained independence 1986
Highest court: Supreme Court
*Population: 78,831

4. Federated States of Micronesia



Attained independence in 1986
Highest court:
Supreme Court of FSM
*Population: 101,675

5. Northern Mariana Islands



Commonwealth established 1976
Highest local court:
Supreme Court of CNMI
*Population: 51,659

6. Republic of Palau



Attained independence in 1994
Highest court: Supreme Court of Palau
*Population: 21,613

*CIA World Factbook (July 2021 estimate)

Moving to Saipan from Korea involved doing what so many families have done—adopting a new home and culture while striving to maintain the old ways. Judge Kim-Tenorio’s parents worked hard to maintain certain core elements of Korean culture in their new home, including bowing to the elderly, celebrating Lunar New Year, yearly ceremonies for deceased family members and especially eating Korean food. As Judge Kim-Tenorio explains, “my dad has not gone a single day in all the time he has lived outside of Korea without eating Korean food. If I take him out for pizza, he will go [afterward] to a Korean restaurant with my mom and have Korean food.” She believes the two cultures have much in common: respect for the elderly, family members caring for the elderly and love of indigenous foods, to name a few.

By the time Judge Kim-Tenorio was nine years old, she knew she wanted to be a lawyer. So, she directed her life toward that goal. She followed her older brother to high school in Colorado, and then went to college in Ann Arbor, Michigan, graduating with an English degree from the University of Michigan. Along the way, she experienced one of those challenges that become a blessing and end up shaping our lives. She became pregnant at age 17 and gave birth to her son at 18. Well aware of the sacrifices her parents were making, and not given to complaining or quitting, she just buckled down and made it work. It took a lot of focus and sacrifice, but she ended up succeeding in college and law school, with a J.D. from the New England School of Law. Her legal career began in Michigan, where she had an epiphany as she went through the daily struggle of managing a job, commuting and childcare amongst strangers. She knew there was another way. She returned to Saipan, where she eventually became legal counsel for the governor. All the challenges of raising a family and working in a demanding career were still there, but among extended family members who could help. That family now includes her husband Perry Tenorio and four boys. While working as legal counsel, an opening came up on the bench, for which she was nominated by Governor Eloy Inos.



Associate Judge Teresa K. Kim-Tenorio

the National Judicial College to bring two four-week webinar series—the first on evidence and the second on contract law.

Adapting a live training program into a virtual program has been no small feat, and we have maintained the program quality while doing so. Committee staff and the education committee members solicited feedback and undertook significant efforts to improve the overall training experience. That being said, we acknowledge Zoom and webinar fatigue and look forward to returning to in-person trainings once the rate of vaccinations increases. Hope is on the horizon. For example, as of mid-May 84% of Palau’s adult population has been fully vaccinated and 68% of RMI’s adult urban population has been fully vaccinated. Palau has begun to ease travel restrictions, and there is a glimmer of hope that Guam soon will ease travel restrictions for vaccinated individuals.

Until we are able to resume live training, we will continue to develop remote training options. Upcoming training programs will be presented in the area of Secondary Trauma, Case Management for Court Clerks, Mediation via Zoom, in addition to a webinar based on the book, “Difficult Conversations.” Once we are able to resume live training, we have a very exciting train-the-trainer course on “Teaching Emotional Awareness and Management to Reduce Self-Harm and Harm to Others as a Means to Reduce Family Violence in the Islands.”

Even though virtual programs cannot substitute for the invaluable in-person discussions and contacts enjoyed in the traditional classroom setting, it is gratifying that the quality of programs and faculty has continued to be exceptional. The judges and staff in the Pacific Islands have embraced change and fully supported our efforts to pivot during COVID-19. We anticipate that we will incorporate the “plus side” of virtual learning into future programs. In closing, I hope that you, your family and your court family are doing well. We look forward to getting together again soon. ●

Judge Kim-Tenorio’s job covers a range of duties, including drug court (which she helped establish), family court, civil and criminal cases. Such work can be both mentally and emotionally challenging. And there is the constant awareness a judge has in a community like Saipan that most people know you are a judge, so you must behave accordingly. It certainly helps that the whole family is committed to the idea of public service, including her three oldest boys who are in the U.S. armed forces (two Air Force, one Army). And she believes the demands of this career, one she chose as a young girl, are outweighed by the privilege of public service, the opportunity to make a difference and the awareness that her challenges are put in perspective by the challenges of the people she sees in court. Her family originally came to Saipan to help make it a better place, and she is honored to continue that legacy. ●



Office of the Circuit Executive

Elizabeth A. Smith, Circuit Executive
P.O. Box 193939, San Francisco, CA 94119-3939
Ph: (415) 355-8900, Fax: (415) 355-8901
<https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov>

Pacific Islands Committee Newsletter Staff:

Renée S. Lorda, *Managing Editor, Assistant Circuit Executive for Public Information, Conference and Education*
Russ Mathieson, *Education Specialist for Public Information, Conference and Education*
Katherine M. Rodriguez, *Communications Administrator for Public Information, Conference and Education*
Alex Clausen, *Audio & Visual Specialist for Public Information, Conference and Education*