



REPUBLIC OF NAURU

Statement by
H.E. President Marcus Stephen, M.P.
at the
General Debate
of the
Sixty-fifth session
of the
United Nations General Assembly

Friday, 24 September 2010
New York

Mr. President,

I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations on your assumption of the Presidency of this sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly. Also, allow me to commend your predecessor, His Excellency Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki for his capable leadership during the sixty-fourth session.

Mr. President,

This week is vitally important for my island of Nauru, and for small island developing states generally. This week we will complete the high level reviews of the Millennium Development Goals and the Mauritius Strategy, two programs that are central to the sustainable development prospects of my country. We gather here on this occasion to reaffirm the central role of the United Nations in global governance. However, the centrality of the United Nations system must derive from its ability to help bring about positive outcomes for all of its membership. In this regard, the UN's report card is mixed.

While this body and others have brought attention to the unique and particular vulnerabilities of small island developing states, they have not always succeeded in delivering concrete benefits. We often have a proliferation of global action plans, but a paucity of action. For this reason, Nauru has relied more on its domestic institutions and bilateral partners rather than multilateral governance solutions.

Nauru turned a corner in 2005 when it adopted its National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS). Under this plan, we have made significant progress across most sectors. Our financial system is now more transparent and government more accountable. Most importantly, we have restored some measure of security for our citizens. Expanded Public health programs, new and refurbished schools, updated curriculum and more teachers. Power is more reliable and its usage more efficient. Regular air and maritime travel has been restored and we have seen major improvements in our communications system.

Most of the gains in the last five years have been a result of our own efforts, largely supported by bilateral development partners targeting our national plans. However, our journey is far from over. Our NSDS lays out a clear path forward to aid independence based on our national circumstances and capacity. The medium- and long-term milestones it contains are fully consistent with, and complementary to, the Millennium Development Goals and Mauritius Strategy of Implementation programs. It is my hope that the United Nations can play a more significant role in this next phase of our development. Five years after our initial request, I am pleased that the United Nations has opened its Joint Presence Office in Nauru. It is my hope that this will enable UN agencies to be more familiar with, and responsive to, our unique development challenges.

The future of all my people depend on an effective United Nations system, but none more so than our youth. Not long ago, my country suffered a devastating economic crisis. This was followed by the explosion of global fuel and food prices and then by the global economic downturn, which many of us are still grappling with today. These crises were exacerbated by virtue of Nauru being a small and isolated island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. As a country, we will overcome; however some impacts will be felt longer than others. Perhaps the most cruel legacy of our economic crisis is the impact it had on the youth who grew up during that trying time.

Advantages that my generation took for granted – a good education, basic health care, and abundant job opportunities – were simply not available for many of our youth during a critical period in their lives. In their absence, substance abuse, illiteracy, delinquency and lifestyle-related illnesses became commonplace. As we progress as a nation, we must ensure that we do not leave one segment of our community behind. Our collective future will not be secure unless we invest in the community and business leaders of tomorrow.

Mr. President,

It is for this reason that Nauru appreciates the importance of the International Year of Youth, which commenced last month. This United Nations tradition began twenty-five years ago when this august body recognized the profoundly important role that youth should have in shaping a new international economic order based on equity and justice.

My government has made investing in our youth a top priority. Nauru is on track to reach our Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015. We have been successful despite the significant shortage of quality Nauruan teachers. Of equal importance to the development of our primary and secondary education systems, is the need to develop technical and vocational training, recognizing and certifying skills and job oriented training. Only by continued investment in human resource development will the next generation of Nauruans be prepared for the challenges of the 21st century.

Our health sector, too, has made gains in curative services and preventative health programs.

However, around 75% of people in the Pacific suffer from non-communicable diseases. This is not sustainable. Investments in public health must be accompanied by investments in improving food security. It will be difficult to improve this alarming statistic unless my people have a reliable supply of affordable and nutritious food. Health education must also receive more emphasis in our educational programs.

Education and public health are obviously two areas that are fundamental for the well being of our youth, but they alone are not enough. Our youth must also have the opportunities to deploy their skills in productive ways, lest those skills wither on the vine. For this, we need a growing economy, and for this, we must look to our development partners and multilateral institutions for assistance.

Aid should be deployed so as to build the foundation for sustainable development in all economic sectors. This must include basic infrastructure, which to date has seen less progress than health and education. The re-establishment of banking and financial services continues to elude us despite all our efforts for urgent assistance. Nation building and youth development must run parallel if either is to succeed.

Investments in basic infrastructure will enable us to expand our economic base, increase exports and also reduce the costs of imports.

Mr. President,

The United Nations system must also be enhanced so that we avoid the mistakes of the past. That is why we are joining others in calling for the creation of a formal "SIDS" category within the United Nations system. The international community has consistently recognized the unique vulnerabilities of SIDS. Yet this recognition has not been translated to effective action. The preparatory work for the five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy found that the vulnerabilities of SIDS remain, and progress towards sustainable development is far below expectations. It is clear that business as usual is not working and that a new approach is long overdue.

The creation of a new SIDS category would make the United Nations more responsive to the particular needs of small islands. This new category should be accompanied by structural support mechanisms in the areas of development assistance, financial support, and trade. Only by dealing with the vulnerabilities of SIDS can there be any realistic prospect of SIDS attaining sustainable economic growth.

Mr. President,

Perhaps the most important test of our commitment to our youth is the state of the world that we leave them. We have long been aware of the environmental crises currently facing our oceans and our climate, but we have done precious little to address them. Without immediate and aggressive international action on both fronts, we will bequeath our children a world that is far poorer than the one we ourselves inhabited.

Nauru takes these threats very seriously, which is why my country, along with other island countries in the Pacific, recently strengthened the Nauru Agreement. This multilateral agreement on oceans governance is a major step in strengthening an effective regime for managing and protecting regional tuna stocks. The preservation of this resource is essential to our region's food security and to our economic development. Regrettably, the sustainability of the tuna stocks and other marine resources that we rely on is threatened by actions beyond our control. Illegal, unreported and unregulated overfishing by large fishing nations is rife in the Pacific, and we lack sufficient resources to respond to this criminal activity. One of the pillars of our economic future is literally being stolen from our children.

In climate change, my island and many others like it face an existential threat far beyond our capacity to adapt. Rising sea levels and extreme weather may one day render my home uninhabitable, but an island can die long before it has disappeared beneath the sea. All that is required is to deprive its youth of hope. What incentive will they have to invest in their home if it will not be there for when they are older? We have an opportunity to change course later this year at the Cancun Climate Change Conference. We must act as if our children's future depended on the decisions we make.

Climate change is a global issue and demands the full participation of all. We therefore call on the immediate inclusion of Taiwan in the UNFCCC process.

We must also recognize that climate change poses many threats – security threats – that are not addressed under the UNFCCC process. It was for this reason that the Pacific Small Island Developing States introduced the General Assembly Resolution on climate change and its possible security implications. As the primary organ of the United Nations entrusted with preserving international peace and security, the Security Council must play its role.

Mr. President,

Lastly, we must ensure that the views and perspectives of *all* nations and peoples are incorporated into the decision making of the United Nations system and its specialized agencies. In this context, Nauru strongly supports Taiwan's campaign for its meaningful participation in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

I would like to conclude by thanking our development partners for their long-standing commitment to Nauru particularly our major partners; Australia, Taiwan, Russia, New Zealand, the European Union and Japan. As well as the many other active partners including; Cuba, Italy, India, Republic of Korea and Israel. We further recognize the international and regional organizations. You have continued to stand by our side during a difficult period in our history and I look forward to our continuing cooperation.

I would also like to commend the United Nations for beginning a difficult process of reflection and reform so that it can more effectively respond to the global challenges we all face. Nauru looks forward to participating in this important discussion so that the UN can continue to play a central role in global governance.

May God bless the Republic of Nauru and may God bless the United Nations.

Thank you.