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Address by President David W. Panuelo

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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I bring you warm greetings from our beautiful islands in the Federated States of Micronesia.

Mr. President,

At the outset, I wish to express that I am particularly pleased that an esteemed leader from a small island developing state (SIDS) has been elected to lead this august body during this crucial 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Your country, the Republic of the Maldives, has been instrumental and effective in leading the world community, particularly on issues relating to the environment and Climate Change, to find common ground. I note with genuine enthusiasm that both of our countries have undertaken partnerships with the Blue Prosperity Coalition to protect at least 30% of our ocean, and that both of our countries, like small island developing states across the World, are committed to building back better through tackling Climate Change. I am thankful and heartened by your leadership and your country's willingness to undertake an even greater commitment to lead this Assembly during these challenging times.

I would also like to pay tribute to the outgoing President of the 75th Session, His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir for his leadership during an unusual and trying time.

As always, we are grateful to our Secretary-General, and my dear friend, Antonio Guterres, who has worked unceasingly to make our United Nations a more effective instrument for the advancement of our common goals. He has the total support of Micronesia and its people, and we congratulate him on his re-election as Secretary-General.

Mr. President,

The theme of this year's session, "building resilience through hope – to recover from COVID-19, rebuild sustainably, respond to the needs of the planet, respect the right of the people, and revitalize the United Nations," is both bold and appropriate.

Crucially, the colors of this year's theme are all part of the portrait of where we are today. At its foundation, we

must respect ourselves the same as we respect others, for an infringement on the rights of one person is an infringement on the rights of us all. We must respond to the environmental needs of the Planet, for the Planet's needs are our needs. We must recover from COVID-19, and rebuild sustainably, which will ensure humankind's resilience for the remainder of the Decade of Action. And to ensure we have hope, to ensure we have unity, we must revitalize the United Nations.

Mr. President,

Micronesia remains COVID-19 free. We have been able to keep the virus at bay by locking down our borders, and by embracing a very close partnership with both the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Thanks to generous support from the United States of America, with whom we share an Enduring Partnership, we have received enough vaccines for our entire population. More than 75% of our adult population has received the first dose of the vaccine, and we are just starting to vaccinate adolescents. Meanwhile, thanks to generous support from the People's Republic of China, with whom we share a Great Friendship, we have established highly functional quarantine sites across our Nation.

Though COVID-19 is not on our shores, the Pandemic has nonetheless effected our people. While I can point out economic data on lost jobs, delays on implementing infrastructure projects, and so forth, perhaps the most meaningful is that by keeping our Nation protected we have also necessarily kept many of our citizens stranded abroad. While repatriation efforts are ongoing, inclusive of pre-quarantine outside Micronesia and in-country quarantine upon arrival, there are still hundreds of families missing their loved ones. To all the Micronesian men and women still stranded abroad, I give you all my word that we will get you home.

Let us build back better health security today to prepare for the next Pandemic tomorrow. Let us all commit to the goals of ending the COVID-19 Pandemic, and creating a stronger health security architecture in 2022. Let us all support the targets for achieving global health security, and let us all elevate global ambition to making shared existential security threats, whether they are the COVID-19 Pandemic or Climate Change, a shared responsibility, that we work together in addressing as nations united for a common purpose.

Mr. President,

Regrettably, the chilling confirmation from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its recent report is a stark reminder that dark days are ahead if no serious and urgent action is taken to deal with the Climate Change crisis. We can no longer worry about whether we have a developing label or a developed label next to our name. We are all in this together, and we must all do our part. The science is clear that both developing and developed countries are affected.

Micronesia remains committed to doing its part in addressing the Climate Change crisis so we can build back better. With Blue Prosperity Micronesia, we are seeking to protect 30% of our Nation's ocean territory. With the Micronesia Challenge, we are seeking to protect 50% of our coastal and terrestrial territory. With recent legislation, we have banned the importation of most forms of plastic, and we are beginning to shift from relying on fossil fuels to renewable energies like solar.

What Micronesia needs from our friends, allies, and development partners in the global community—and that includes everyone watching me today, because Micronesia is family to the United States and a friend to the People's Republic of China, just as Micronesia is a friend to the Maldives and to the United Kingdom, to the Netherlands and to Spain, to Nicaragua and to Australia, to New Zealand and to South Africa, to Israel and to Norway, to Japan and to Korea—what we need is global action today for our World's prosperity tomorrow.

Mr. President,

We must look past what separates us, and focus on what unites us. The positive step undertaken by the United States to rejoining the Paris Agreement and sponsoring a Climate Summit is all very encouraging, because the World needs the United States if we are to solve the Climate Change crisis, on the premise that the World needs every country to work together. The World needs the United States, just as the World needs China, as the World needs Japan, as the World needs Australia, to all come together for global survival.

The secret to the threat of Climate Change is the same as the secret to the threat of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The moment we decide that the threat is a specific country or a specific person, then we all lose. The way that we all win is cooperating together. Micronesia is willing to do its part, and is actively doing its part. We ask all of our friends, allies, and development partners to join us today. Today, we encourage all countries to be bold, and submit more ambitious revised Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).

Mr. President,

While we took encouragement from the international response to the Paris Agreement, the Climate Crisis should also motivate us to ratify and integrate the Kigali Amendment into our national policies to ensure the avoidance of life-threatening damage to our planet. That is why I am urging countries which are major contributors to carbon emissions to ratify the Kigali Amendment, and to phase down the production and consumption of HFCs.

Mr. President,

The presence and utilization of the rule of law is the true barometer for civilization. Micronesia has been taking many steps to strengthen the rule of law in our country. We are seeking to pass legislation on cybercrimes, we will be joining the International Police Organization (INTERPOL), and we have committed to tackling illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing in our waters in cooperation with organizations like the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Micronesian Presidents Summit. We have strengthened maritime surveillance with Australia and Japan, and look forward to the receipt of two new Guardian-class patrol ships, or vessels, from Australia to help us protect our Big Ocean State.

Yet, of all the actions most important for Micronesia's continued capacity to promote and protect the rule of law, it is through our Enduring Partnership with the United States of America, which is codified through the Compact of Free Association. Negotiations over the expiring provisions of the Compact are ongoing, and in light of the recent High-Level Defense Talks this July, Micronesia calls on the United States to help us conclude our negotiations before the current agreements are set to expire at the end of 2023.

Mr. President,

The Federated States of Micronesia accepts the responsibility to continue to speak out, along with similarly committed States, on how the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea ("UNCLOS") applies to maritime zones in situations involving Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise. Last month, the Pacific Islands countries endorsed a landmark Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise, which has been affirmed by both the Pacific Islands Forum and the Micronesian Presidents' Summit. The Declaration is a formal statement of the views of these island countries. As recognized by the Declaration, the threat of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise is, and I quote, a "defining issue that imperils the livelihoods and wellbeing of our peoples and undermines the realization of a peaceful, secure, and sustainable future for our region" of the Pacific.

Recent reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change underscore that global sea-level rise associated with Climate Change is likely to be as high as one meter by the end of this century, with the Western

Pacific having already experienced three times more sea-level rise than the current global mean. Many of us, like my own country, Micronesia, sit in this region of the Pacific.

In light of these circumstances, and in acknowledgement of the potential legal implications of sea-level rise on maritime zones such as those of Micronesia, the Declaration proclaims, among other things, that our islands' "maritime zones, once established in accordance with the UNCLOS and notified to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with UNCLOS, and the rights and entitlements that flow from them, shall continue to apply, notwithstanding any physical changes connected to Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise."

It will be deeply unjust and inequitable if a small island developing State like Micronesia, being specially affected by Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise, despite being among the least responsible for the phenomenon, has to surrender any of its maritime rights and entitlements because of such sea-level rise, including its rights and entitlements to rich fishery resources in our Exclusive Economic Zone. Fortunately, the Pacific islands' collective views as expressed in the Declaration are supported by both UNCLOS and the legal principles underpinning it. Micronesia reiterates its endorsement of the Declaration and encourages the international community to favorably consider the Declaration and its overarching objectives.

Mr. President,

As a nation covering over a million square miles of ocean, we attach great importance to the sustainable use and management of marine resources within and adjacent to our territorial waters. Our people have lived in harmony with the Ocean and their natural environment since our ancestors began to navigate these vast seas. We have relied on the traditional knowledge in conserving our land and seas, and will continue to look to it for best practices in preserving the resources that come from the Ocean, and also utilize it to fight Climate Change.

Micronesia will continue to advocate for more effective conservation of our marine and forest resources. Our traditions dictate it, and our survival requires it. Long before the terms "marine sanctuaries" and "marine protected areas" (MPAs) became everyday terms with our people, the concepts have already existed throughout many of our traditional Micronesian societies.

Through these various initiatives Micronesia is currently engaged in, such as the Micronesia Challenge 2030, Blue Prosperity Micronesia, and the Technology for Tuna Transparency (T3) Challenge, we are investing in our future.

With biodiversity around our planet at risk and in serious decline, Micronesia and its partners are taking concrete actions. We must step up collectively and do more to protect and restore our planet's biodiversity. I encourage all who wish to stand with us to do so, as Micronesia will show you peace, friendship, cooperation, and love in our common humanity.

Mr. President,

I commend the Secretary-General for taking the initiative to convene the United Nations Food Systems Summit, which will be held at the end of this General Assembly. The focus on food systems, in all its aspects, from production to processing, and from consumption to waste utilization, recognizes the integral role that food plays in our lives, in our health, our livelihood, our economy, and our environment. In the dialogues leading up to the forthcoming Food Systems Summit, we have been seeing a surge of community-level awareness and commitment to address consumption behavior to address the ravages of food-related non-communicable diseases. Approximately one third of Micronesians suffer from diabetes and high-blood pressure, largely as a direct result for our recent social preferences for highly processed, and salty, imported foods. Our current food system is unsustainable, and so we are trying to change it, to re-indigenize it, as part of our commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Decade of Action.

Mr. President,

The effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has always been at the top of our agenda. In the North Pacific, we are fully aware that the UN system's commitment and support on the ground is necessary if we are to achieve many of the goals. We, therefore, warmly welcome the imminent opening of the new UN Multi-Country Office for the North Pacific, with Micronesia as its host. The countries of the North Pacific are most grateful to our Secretary-General for his foresight and decision to open this new office. As host, I pledge my country's full support, and we commit to doing our part in ensuring the expedited entry into the country of the international staff of the new MCO.

The reform of the United Nations Development system has shown promising results. Its success remains in the hands of our Organization's membership. It is time to rethink how best we, as members, can provide funding support to the system. We have to ensure that adequate and sustainable financing is available to support the responses from the Resident Coordinators to the needs of the most vulnerable.

Mr. President,

The reform of our United Nations, in particular the reform of the UN Security Council, remains a relevant subject of discussion year after year. We must recommit to completing the unfinished work which has eluded us for decades. It is appropriate that members of this august body that have contributed so much to our Organization, such as Japan, be included as permanent members on a reformed Council.

Mr. President,

I conclude by applauding the United Nations for its continued efforts to unite the nations of our World, and encourage the United Nations to continue to live up to its responsibility in ensuring that no society or people are left behind. Micronesia has faith in the United Nations, and will actively work to ensure that the United Nations is successful.

I further conclude by explicitly calling on all Nations and Peoples who hear me today to know that the People and Government of Micronesia extends to you friendship, and urges you to take action to extend that same friendship and love to your fellow human beings. There are real challenges facing us all today, and we find ourselves wishing we could live in a better world. But a better world is not something we ask for. A better world is something we build. We define a better world through consensus, with a foundation of empathy and love for other human beings. We construct a better world by acknowledging that we are who we choose to be, and then choosing to take responsibility for both ourselves and our communities.

Micronesia chooses to take responsibility for solving the Climate Change crisis and for ending the COVID-19 Pandemic. We cannot do it alone. We need you, all of you, to stand with us, as nations united, to take actions today for our global prosperity tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. President, and God Bless our United Nations.