



REPUBLIC OF NAURU

STATEMENT

BY

HE. THE HON. MARCUS STEPHEN, M.P.
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAURU

AT THE

GENERAL DEBATE

OF THE

SIXTY-FOURTH SESSION

OF THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. President,

I would like to offer my congratulations on your assumption of the Presidency of this sixty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly. Also, allow me to commend your predecessor, His Excellency Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockman for his capable leadership during the sixty-third session.

May I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation as you lead the work during this important session.

Mr. President,

The new millennium has been no stranger to crisis. We have seen how ideological extremism can foment turmoil and civil unrest in ways that do not respect international borders. We have also learnt that financial instability can quickly propagate through global markets and cause chaos in the real economy. And we have been repeatedly reminded that we disrespect the natural environment at our peril.

The global challenges we face today may sometimes shock us, but they should not surprise us. Most stem from problems that have been allowed to fester and grow for many years, if not decades. All are inextricably linked to choices made by the international community regarding international commerce and development.

The challenges of the new millennium are global in nature and therefore require a global response. Now, more than ever, we must revitalize our multilateral systems of governance in order to make them more responsive and more representative. Large countries tend to dominate international fora and drown out the rest of us. In the case of climate change and small island states, I mean this quite literally. We must consider the impacts of our activities and institutions on the most vulnerable, so that large and small countries alike can enjoy the stability and security necessary for sustainable economic development.

In this new millennium, even the mighty have been humbled, so what does that mean for a small island nation like Nauru? When giants stumble, it is usually the smallest that suffer the most serious injuries.

Mr. President,

The international community must begin this process of renewal by reaffirming its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, an initiative meant to alleviate the burdens of extreme poverty, hunger, illiteracy, inequality, and disease. After early success in the '90s, progress towards the MDGs has slowed throughout the world. The Pacific, where nearly 40% of the population lives on less than a dollar a day, has been no different.

The reasons are not hard to identify. The Asian Financial Crisis was devastating for the economies in our region. The recent spike in food and energy prices strained our limited financial resources. Now the global economic downturn threatens to depress our economies even further.

Additionally, the Pacific confronts a unique set of challenges to reaching our MDGs. Our remoteness makes it difficult to access world markets and greatly increases the costs of doing business. Our small size deprives us of the advantages of economies of scale. And our vulnerability to climate change places our hard won economic and social progress in jeopardy.

Perhaps the most vivid example of our situation is the price of a bag of rice. For most countries, the food crisis has eased as commodity prices have fallen, but in Nauru, the price of a bag of rice increased by 80% over the past year, hovering now above \$60. The rest of the world pays less than \$25.

The time has come for the international community to deliver on its promises and dedicate 0.7% of Gross National Income to helping developing countries meet their development goals. Past recessions have led to a steep drop in levels of official development assistance. There will be no hope of reaching our MDGs if that happens again.

It is also vitally important for UN agencies to strengthen their engagement in the Pacific region. For the past four years, Nauru has called upon the United Nations to establish a presence on the ground by opening an office in our country. It is my fervent hope that the next time I address this august body, I can announce that this commitment of the United Nations has been fulfilled.

The absence of the UN in the Pacific is reflected by the paucity of statistics collected in the region. Accurate indicators are necessary for tracking economic and social progress. It is critical for UN agencies and other international institutions to work more closely with our national governments and regional organizations so that accurate data is available for planning and policy making.

The temptation to add layers upon layers of new programs must be avoided. We must not forget the commitments made under the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation, the Monterrey Consensus, the Paris Declaration and other international agreements. Too often, the UN and other development partners succeed in delivering many new reports but fail to deliver tangible results. Action plans are no substitute for action.

And we must dispense with the excuse that helping poor countries develop is something we cannot afford. That is simply not true - quite the opposite. In a globalized world, leaving large portions of the world to languish in poverty is the thing we cannot afford.

Mr. President,

The international community must also reform the world financial system so that all developing countries share equitably in global economic prosperity. The current economic crisis has revealed deep flaws in our international financial system. The overriding goals of these reforms should be to facilitate growth in developing nations and to increase their resilience to abrupt economic fluctuations and the fickle flow of capital.

While Nauru does not have a mature financial sector, shocks to the international system can be devastating to our local economy and dry up vital development assistance. To be effective, development assistance needs to be reliable. That is not possible without a stable and transparent financial system.

Mr. President,

Lastly, the international community must next take swift steps to mitigate climate change, starting with a bold agreement in Copenhagen. Climate change presents the greatest threat to my country and many other small island developing states. Scientists warn that, within our children's lifetimes, sea levels may rise by a meter or more. This would wipe out low-lying coastal areas and many Pacific islands would be a distant memory.

But we don't need to wait for this catastrophic scenario to see the impacts of climate change. We live with them every day. Flooding and inundation are already eroding our shores and contaminating our water supply. Higher water temperatures and ocean acidification are damaging the marine ecosystems that we depend on for food and our economic livelihood. And we pray that malaria does not find its way to our doorstep.

I applaud the commitment of the Secretary General to addressing this issue and his efforts to build consensus among world leaders this week at the High Level Summit on Climate Change. From Asia, to Africa, to the Arctic, he has visited affected regions to observe the effects of climate change first hand, but not the Pacific,

one of the most vulnerable regions in the world. Mr. Secretary General, when you glance out the window of your aircraft while travelling between Asia and the Americas, please remember that in the vast expanse of water below, there is a whole region of people living on small islands who are already grappling with the consequences of climate change. I encourage that your next trip be to the nations of the Pacific before they disappear.

The science tells us that we must reduce the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere to 350 parts per million or less in order to avoid the most dire climate change scenarios. However, most developed countries have proposed emissions targets that would result in concentrations far higher.

This is not acceptable policy when human lives are at stake. If a doctor prescribes medicine to treat a serious illness, do we only give the patient half of what is needed? If an engineer says eight columns are necessary to support a building, would any responsible person recommend that we only use four? Then why are the most vulnerable countries asked to accept proposals that would surely lead to our extinction? This is not good enough when the lives of real people from real places are being threatened.

Developed countries must also provide the financial, technical, and human resources necessary for us to address this problem that was not of our own making. Nauru joins the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in calling for developed countries to provide the equivalent of 1% of their GDP for urgent adaptation and mitigation efforts in developing countries. This must be in addition to their current commitments for development assistance.

Mr. President,

Climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation from every member of the international community. Taiwan, as one of the world's twenty largest economies, can contribute in many ways, and should be invited to play a larger role in the UN system, particularly in the UNFCCC process. Taiwan has much to offer to vulnerable countries, especially in adaptation measures, technology transfer and financing.

Climate change is an imminent threat to international security. It is therefore vital that the Security Council become seized of the issue and closely monitor new developments. Special attention must be paid to the most vulnerable countries, including the small island developing states and least developed countries, and also to vulnerable groups within countries, including women and children, indigenous people, and the poor.

Mr. President,

The challenges of the new millennium can only be overcome through multilateral cooperation and a revitalized UN system. It is necessary for the Security Council to be more representative in both the permanent and non-permanent categories, to reflect current geopolitical realities, which is why Japan, India, Germany, and Brazil should be made permanent members. I also call upon the General Assembly, as the world's most representative governance body, to accept Taiwan's meaningful participation in its specialized agencies and other world forums.

Mr. President,

We have seen the power of multilateral cooperation around the world and close to home. My country was at the brink of economic collapse at the beginning of this decade. In cooperation with Pacific Islands Forum member governments, my country outlined a number of key governance and development priorities in the Pacific Regional Assistance to Nauru, or PRAN. It included a reevaluation of fiscal policies and objectives, review of our constitution, and reforms for our education and health sectors. I am proud that in just four years we have reached the goals laid out in PRAN. So much so that at the 40th Pacific Islands Forum held in Cairns,

Australia just last month, Leaders agreed that Nauru has emerged from the crisis phase and is on the path to sustainable economic recovery and development, and that PRAN is no longer required.

PRAN was an excellent example of how country-focused development aid can quickly lift a nation out of crisis and back onto the path towards sustainable development. PRAN was successful because it identified concrete objectives, was backed by sufficient funds. Future programs in the region should likewise bring tangible benefits and be free from political influence.

Here I must acknowledge and express Nauru's deepest appreciation to Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Japan and Forum Island Countries, our own regional organizations and others for their unwavering funding and other forms of support to PRAN. The people of Nauru will always remember their generosity during our time of need.

We are also grateful to the UN Democracy Fund. With their assistance, Nauru recently passed a number of important constitutional amendments that will enhance good governance and bring increased stability and responsiveness to my government.

Mr. President,

One of the Fathers of the United Nations once said, "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little", (quote, unquote). President Roosevelt passed away before the inaugural session of the General Assembly, but those of us here today have the responsibility to see that his spirit lives on.

The United Nations system of multilateral governance was born out of a time of great crisis and it ushered in over half a century of peace and prosperity. However, the benefits were not shared equally and two thirds of humanity was largely left behind. The time has come to take up the project begun sixty-four years ago so that future prosperity can be shared by all, including the smallest and most vulnerable. The United Nations continues to be our best hope for creating a more fair and just world.

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

Thank you.