



REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

H.E. Mr. Christopher Loeak
President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
General Debate
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Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen -

I bring you the warm greetings of Yokwe from the Marshall Islands.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands was born as a first in the hearts and minds of the Marshallese people - but we also forged our nationhood under the auspices of the UN flag.

Thus the United Nations is truly our second home.

Our unique story – from UN Trusteeship, to Member State – deserves reflection by the international community, two decades after we were welcomed as a UN member.

The UN Millennium Development Goals will be reviewed in three years time – and the Marshall Islands is now firmly committed to making stronger progress, especially in regards to achieving full access to adequate education, access to decent employment and ensuring a sustainable environment. The MDGs are not distant figures or statistics – the MDGs are in the faces of our Marshallese children, the MDGs are in our classrooms and hospitals.

One of the most immediate and necessary steps is to better integrate our bilateral and regional development pathways with the MDGs, to ensure all efforts move in the same direction, and towards the same common goals.

As the Asia-Pacific region rises in the global spotlight, so also must the Marshall Islands. Our national future is still within our grasp – and our future need not be so difficult if we - and our partners - take the hard actions needed to change it.

Today, the Marshall Islands commits to being a key success story in the Pacific – we will move on specific actions to make firm and measurable progress towards the MDGs, and also towards economic independence resting on an expanded private sector, especially in regard to our primary drivers of fisheries and tourism. We simply have no other alternative but to rewrite our own future.

We look forward with targets instead of generalities. I have asked my government for specific, quantified development goals - and I have also asked my government to list the necessary actions, from ourselves and our partners, needed to get there.

Today, I am encouraging bilateral partners, especially our closest partners, as well as the UN Secretary-General and the Pacific Islands Forum, including its regional agencies, to respond. Next year, I hope to present you with a report not about our plight, but about our progress.

It is easy - but also rightful - to blame the international community especially on climate change and fisheries - where the open political assurances of our partners too often falls victim to their own self-interest, once the negotiating doors close.

Yet the ultimate burden for achieving greater national success must be on the Marshall Islands government and the Marshallese people - however unfair multilateral outcomes may be to the smallest nations, we must and we will do whatever is in our national power to assure a viable future. Nothing will stand in our way.

The Marshall Islands is far from alone - many nations in the Pacific Islands region share similar challenges. Our collective Pacific progress must be a key pillar of the 2014 global conference on sustainable development for small island states, to be held in the Pacific.

The next leaders summit of the Pacific Islands Forum will be held next year in the Marshall Islands, and this meeting will reveal firm and dramatic progress not only towards basic social and environment goals, but also how a very real expansion of public-private partnership will be jump-started in the Pacific.

Mr. President,

Since 1954, Marshallese leaders have visited the United Nations to address the ongoing impacts of the 67 nuclear tests conducted on our lands during our status as a UN Trust Territory. This is our first foreign policy issue - and it is more than a historical legacy - it is a contemporary reality for our local communities. The UN authorized many of these tests through two resolutions in 1954 and 1956, which also made assurances of our basic human rights and our full and safe to lands where today too many Marshallese remain "nuclear nomads" - still unable to safely resettle. While I acknowledge the important efforts taken to date - half-lives of radioactive material remain for generations, and much more remains to be done.

But today - for the first time since the Trusteeship resolution of 1956 - the UN has finally spoken. Earlier this month, the Special Rapporteur on toxic waste, Mr. Callin Georgescu, presented his report to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, regarding the nuclear testing program in the Marshall Islands. The Special Rapporteur has presented significant findings - that the pain, mistrust, progress and failures of the Marshallese people over decades have a human rights dimension - and that the international community must respond with more than silence. The Marshallese people have paid too heavy a price for the only instance in which the United Nations explicitly authorized the use of nuclear weapons.

I urge all relevant actors - the United States, and the wider international community and its agencies - to join with the Marshall Islands and the Pacific Islands Forum members in

welcoming the Special Rapporteur's specific recommendations, as a way forward to assure progress on regaining the very human rights which should never have been lost. The Special Rapporteur's report must not be allowed to only collect dust on the shelf – it should instead be a foundation for new efforts, particularly with key international agencies.

We have no more time for well-worn accusations. The Marshall Islands government must not fail to advance the human rights of our own citizens – and where old solutions have not worked, we must not fail to find new ones.

Mr. President,

We are not only a small island state – but truly a “large ocean nation.” Our sustainable fisheries represent a primary pathway to the very economic strength and social development I have just called for today. Yet our aspirations are too often undermined by the narrow commercial self-interest of those nations at the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission who might otherwise seek to embrace us as close political partners. Our collective Pacific development is, for us, not an isolated issue bound in technical jargon – it is the very hope and economic survival of our entire nation, and indeed the whole Pacific region. We realize only a penny of true benefit for every dollar of fishing activity, and despite scientific warning, pressure on key fish stocks has only increased, not diminished. Decades of global lip-service at the UN to sustainable development seem to be lost on some of our fishing partners.

The Parties to the Nauru Agreement have become a watershed political movement – recently achieving certification of a sustainable fishery by the Marine Stewardship Council – perhaps the largest such fishery in the world. In the Pacific, we are already well-deep into advancing the very sustainable development measures agreed to at this year's Rio Plus 20 summit – and we are growing our own Pacific-driven commercial brand. It remains to be seen if key distant-water fishing nations will continue to join with us in forging a landmark sustainable fishery, or if they will choose to be left behind on the sidelines.

Mr. President,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is among the lowest-lying nations in the world, and sea level rise projections of more than a meter pose complex risks to our future statehood – risks which we are only beginning to unpack and address. Last year's watershed agreement on the Durban Platform has moved the UNFCCC into a new chapter of a single, legally-binding protocol applying to all nations by 2020, and has also redoubled urgent efforts needed to close the global mitigation gap. The time is now over for endless North-South division, and all-too-predictable fingerpointing must end.

But the world can no longer wait for negotiators, and we must do more than pat ourselves on the back, if we are serious about reducing the risks to our future. More action is needed by all nations, and all actors, in all possible settings and negotiation forums. As the Marshall Islands, we have a national energy plan – and UNFCCC target – to cut our own emissions, boost our

efficiency and pursue new technology such as Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion, which can make us a "carbon negative" nation. I ask the rest of the world if you will also meet us in increasing ambition? Will it come soon enough?

Climate adaptation poses perhaps the most complex challenges for a low-lying nation – but we must overcome them nonetheless. We cannot rely only on an uncertain architecture of global climate finance to address the very critical adaptation efforts, which will be necessary for our continued survival. The large scale – up to \$100 billion dollars a year - of the future Green Climate Fund, and other efforts, can easily overlook our relatively modest needs. Our increasingly urgent needs on the ground can no longer be met with paper studies and disconnected pilot projects. Yet the Marshall Islands is at present heavily reliant on international assistance, and we have little other means to provide for adaptation. The growing realization that, however wrongful, that we must finance some of our own adaptation efforts is perhaps the most compelling reason to rapidly expand our private sector. We must also create financial security through the "debt for adaptation" swap being pursued by the Marshall Islands and other small island nations.

Mr. President,

The United Nations cannot fail the needs of the most vulnerable nations, and must better capture the efforts of all necessary actors. The Marshall Islands urges other nations to advance the meaningful participation of Taiwan within the UN system and international community. Building on the successful efforts of the World Health Assembly, Taiwan's participation as an observer should be created within the UNFCCC and ICAO. The international community should also recognize the strong efforts, and further potential, for Taiwan to assist the world in meeting the MDGs.

Mr. President,

The international community must not fail to act not only to address long-term threats, but also the most immediate security concerns. Recent tension in the broader Pacific Rim is an important matter for the Pacific Islands region, which itself can only grow with security and stability. I urge that these issues, including the East China sea, be peacefully addressed through an inclusive dialogue involving all key actors.

Mr. President,

In closing, the smallest nations in the world, many in the Pacific, are rising to play important and unique roles on the international stage. But nations such as the Marshall Islands also depend closely on firm multilateral action – the United Nations and its members must stand for more than symbolism, but for decisive and bold leadership so urgently needed in this international hour.