



PALAU MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. STUART BECK

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF PALAU TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

TO THE 67TH REGULAR SESSION

OF THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. President,

This year's General Debate began with a declaration by world leaders that our collective response to all challenges must be guided by the rule of law. Palau is proud to join in that declaration, as our national story is inextricably linked with the international rule of law. Not long ago, Palau emerged as the last United Nations Trust Territory – granted independence after more than one hundred years and four successive colonial administrations. Our unique road to freedom left us with a lasting legacy: a strong partnership with the United States of America and a constitution that guarantees for the Palauan people the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Through independence, we have preserved our heritage, our culture, and our environment. That preservation was marked this year by UNESCO's designation of the Rock Islands as 2012's only natural and cultural world heritage site. And, just last year, the United Nations Development Program ranked Palau 49th in the world in its Human Development Index – a composite measure of life expectancy, health, educational attainment, and living standards. We are proud of this ranking. It is a tribute to our success.

Having gained so much, Mr. President, Palau has worked to give back to the international community and to make the world a better place. Palau proudly deployed officers as Peacekeepers in Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands, and continues to do so today in Darfur.

Upon first taking our UN seat, we focused our energies on the odious practice of deep sea bottom trawling. And though it has taken some time and considerable buy-in from others, two consensus General Assembly Resolutions – 61/105 and 66/68 – show that we can help protect vulnerable deep-sea marine ecosystems and protect biodiversity on a global scale.

In 2009, Palau's President Toribiong launched the first volley in an effort to save the world's dwindling shark populations: we declared the world's first shark sanctuary in our General Debate address. The ocean's vitality depends on healthy shark populations. So we are grateful that states and territories from across the globe have joined Palau by committing to nurture shark sanctuaries. Today, 1.8 Million square miles of ocean – an area approximately nine times the size of Palau's waters – are safe for sharks.

Palau was also first to sound the alarm on the security impacts of climate change. With our Pacific brothers and sisters, we moved early on to declare climate change a security issue that demands special attention by every organ of the UN system. This was a new and different way of thinking about the problem. Some questioned skeptically whether Blue Helmets would hold back the rising tides.

Eighteen months after we began, this Assembly adopted by consensus resolution 63/281 inviting relevant organs of the United Nations to intensify their efforts to consider and

address climate change, including its possible security implications. This call was heeded by Germany when they took up the issue last July as President of the Security Council. Thanks to their efforts, as well as others on the Council, we now have a historic Presidential Statement highlighting the potential risks of climate change to international peace and security.

Germany's Statement and the preceding General Assembly Resolution have not stemmed the rising tides. But they have helped to change the way we understand and discuss climate change. No longer can anyone question the impact of climate change on energy security, food security, water security, or territorial integrity. No longer can anyone deny that rising seas and oppressive drought are displacing people across the globe. In the words of the United States' Permanent Representative at last year's Council meeting, to deny the security implications of climate change would be "pathetic."

Mr. President,

The world has reached a cross roads on sustainable development. We have recently concluded discussions at Rio +20 and will soon delineate new Sustainable Development Goals, and focus again on Small Island Developing States. For Palau, this crossroads is an opportunity to better integrate healthy oceans and fisheries into the governing development framework.

Sustainable fisheries are Palau's lifeblood. For Palau, it has always been, and continues to be, a blue economy or no economy. That is why we have limited purse seine fishing, agreed to close the donut holes between our jurisdictions, and implemented an innovative "vessel day scheme" through the Parties to the Nauru Agreement. It is also why we have conserved fifty-eight percent of our in-shore marine area through the Protected Areas Network, banned bottom trawling, and declared the world's first shark sanctuary.

We were honored this year that the Protected Areas Network Act and the Shark Haven Act received the 2012 Future Policy Award for outstanding maritime policy, contributing most effectively to the sustainable management of the world's oceans and coasts for the benefit of current and future generations. We thank the World Future Council, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Food and Agriculture Organization, Okeanos Foundation for the Sea and the Global Environmental Facility for their generous recognition and support.

Mr. President,

Palau champions three straightforward principles for global fisheries. First, global fisheries should be fair. If distant water vessels want to come for fish that traverse Palau's waters, then they should respect our laws. They should fish within our limits and recognize our right to realize the benefits of our natural resources. Illegal fishing is tantamount to piracy: it robs us of our livelihoods and undermines our security. Second, global fisheries should be sustainable. We should use every means at our disposal to achieve stocks levels that will ensure healthy fisheries for the long term. This includes

closing fisheries when necessary. Third, global fisheries should be accountable. Reports show that eighty seven percent of global fish stocks are now fully or over exploited. These are the worst numbers on record. Regional Fisheries Management Organizations should do better, and should be more transparent.

We are encouraged that negotiations this year allowed the General Assembly Resolution on sustainable fisheries to better reflect these principles.

Mr. President,

Palau is pleased to report on the success of a number of key domestic initiatives, which we have previously raised at the General Debate.

Palau has taken innovative steps to reduce our emissions by solarizing our airport, our government buildings, and our highways. By 2020, we will generate 20% of our energy from renewable sources. We have also created a successful green mortgage program to assist the financing of greener homes. This program, which began with a small amount of financing from Italy, was recently the subject of a workshop among thirteen regional financing institutions, with plans for expansion throughout Pacific.

Palau is also working to connect itself to the world – literally. While inconceivable here in New York, Palau remains without broadband Internet. This means that no Palauan can watch the streaming video of this speech. The Broadband Commission of the International Telecommunications Union tells us that broadband access is a prerequisite to achieving the Millennium Development goals and that a 10% increase in broadband penetration increases a developing country's GDP by 1.4%. We are sure that a 100% increase would fundamentally improve Palauan health, business, and civic engagement. We continue to seek partners that might help us reach that goal.

Last year Palau underwent its Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review. The most repeated recommendation by Human Rights Council members was that we should establish a National Human Rights Institution. With the help of new partners, we are translating human rights conventions into Palauan, bringing the lessons of international human rights into our schools, harmonizing our national legislation, regulations, and practices with the international human rights instruments, and supporting human rights programs and services in Palau through a formal institution.

All these activities have been complimented by the outstanding work being done to remove explosive remnants of World War II from Palau. As President Toribiong stated from this podium last year, many of these explosives are still live, and are being discovered near our schools, our roads, and our utilities. With the help of our partners, many of these explosives are being destroyed. We hope that anyone interested in our efforts will attend our regional workshop in October to see first-hand the successful model of cooperation between Palau's government, an NGO, donors, and the local community that is eradicating unexploded ordnance from our midst.

We would like to express our gratitude for the strong support and friendship of our partners for helping to get these and other important projects off the ground. Palau thanks especially the United States, Japan, Australia, and the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Palau continues to believe that Taiwan's meaningful participation in the UN system will help to further promote the efficacy, goals and ideals of the UN, including at the International Civil Aviation Organization and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Mr. President,

Palau appreciates that you have chosen 'the settlement of disputes by peaceful means' as the theme for this year's General Debate. It is as important as ever that we commit to upholding the peace and condemn violence wherever it occurs. To that end, Palau condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent Embassy attacks in the Middle East. We agree with President Obama that such attacks are "an assault on the very ideals upon which the United Nations was founded." We must be vigilant in protecting all diplomatic missions, wherever they might be. Closer to our shores, Palau is also hopeful that tensions in the East China Sea will dissipate, and that all of our neighbors can engage in a more peaceful dialogue.

Mr. President,

The Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, cautioned the world last week that we are willfully blind when it comes to climate change. We are awash in reports telling us that the situation is dire. We have experienced more than 100 consecutive months of temperatures above global averages. Nine of the 10 warmest years on record have occurred since the year 2000. Arctic sea ice is at its lowest level in recorded history. Coral reefs are disappearing at an alarming rate.

Buried in the International Panel on Climate Change's Report on Managing Risks is advice to Small Island State policy makers that they might, in certain cases, consider relocating populations. We assure you, Mr. President, that Palau has no intention to move our people. Our islands are our home. They are essence of our very being. We will pursue every legitimate recourse available to us before we concede hope.

The current situation at the UNFCCC is unacceptable. After more than twenty years of negotiations, we are running out of creative ways to say that countries are being destroyed. Sadly, it seems that the most vulnerable countries have become acceptable collateral damage. The world knows the causes of climate change, and it is within our grasp to effect a solution. No army stands in our way.

If something is not done soon, all the good, hard work to which Palau has dedicated itself will be for naught.

In conclusion, Mr. President,

We know that the times we live in are turbulent. But we must heed our leaders' call to be guided by the UN Charter and the international rule of law. Palau will continue to do its part by being a moral voice for what is right, and a model global citizen.

Thank you.