



***Statement delivered by His Excellency the Honourable Baron Waqa, M.P.,
President of the Republic of Nauru***

*United Nations General Assembly – Seventy-First Session
General Debate*

Wednesday, 21 September 2016

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates

It is an honor to be here for the seventy-first session of the United Nations General Assembly. On behalf of the Republic of Nauru, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Peter Thompson on his assumption to the Presidency of the General Assembly. It is wonderful to see one of my Pacific Island brothers at the helm. Let me assure you of the full support of my delegation as you lead the important work of this August body.

I would also like to thank His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft for his exceptional work as our outgoing President.

Mr. President,

Your position comes with enormous responsibility, and this next session will be more important than most. Every time we turn on the television, we are treated to images of turmoil. From violent extremism, to political upheaval, large-scale migration, and a climate in chaos – the world is at a crossroads and this Assembly will decide the path we choose. Fortunately, the one hundred and ninety-three Members of the United Nations have given you a detailed roadmap to guide your work. The SAMOA Pathway, the 2030 (twenty-thirty) Agenda, Paris

Climate Agreement, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and Sendai Framework – these universal agreements capture the collective will of the international community.

These agreements point the way toward greater cooperation, and Nauru is deeply committed to their full implementation. The commitments we have made to each other represent our best effort to meet the challenges before us. And we made these commitments knowing that some of us need help to reach them. We agreed that no country should be left behind.

Now begins the most important work – translating our words to concrete action. Our primary task is directing resources to where it matters.

We should not underestimate the difficulty. Some international funding mechanisms exclude small countries like mine, or prove impossible to access because of our limited capacity. Private investment is unreliable, and rarely available to support basic services and critical infrastructure. Meanwhile, the most promising financing models for small developing countries, like direct access and direct budgetary support, are rarely available as an option.

This needs to change, so that small countries fully benefit from the historic agreements we have reached.

Nauru is asking a lot from its development partners. We want to be better partners ourselves. Therefore, our efforts must go beyond capacity building to focus on institution building. These efforts must be backed by real resources and include long-term, in-country engagement of international and regional agencies. The goal must be nothing short of building durable domestic institutions run by a skilled national workforce.

On this note, let me thank our partners; Australia, Taiwan, Japan, the Russian Federation, Cuba, New Zealand and others for their support towards our sustainable development priorities.

Mr. President,

Implementation of Goal 14 (fourteen) - the sustainable use of the oceans, and marine resources - is a high priority. The Ocean is a pillar of our small island economy, our environment and our culture.

Stresses on marine biodiversity mounting, including those beyond national jurisdiction, therefore, the gaps in our governance of the high seas must be addressed. We urge a timely and comprehensive conclusion to the Preparatory Committee process on biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The upcoming UN Oceans Conference presents a welcome and much needed opportunity to foster a shared vision for a healthy, productive, and resilient ocean that guides all our ocean-related activities.

Let me also highlight the importance of the long-term conservation and sustainable use of our fisheries resources. The Parties to the Nauru Agreement are on the cutting edge of sustainable fisheries management. However, the international community must ensure that a disproportionate burden of conservation measures does not fall on SIDS. The burden and costs of these measures must be shared equitably.

Mr. President,

The full implementation of our international commitments takes on much greater urgency in the face of climate change. That is why Nauru was among the first countries in the world to ratify the Paris Agreement. It is encouraging to hear we are on track for entry into force this year. However, it is far too early to celebrate. The Paris Agreement is not the end of our climate work. It is only the beginning.

Greenhouse gas emissions over the past one hundred and fifty years have pushed the climate system beyond the boundaries of human experience. The brewing super-storms and droughts can be as destructive as any bomb. Sea level rise can occupy our territory as surely as an invading army. From the perspective of my small island nation in the Pacific, climate change is our greatest humanitarian crisis. It is our war.

And while Nauru will be among the first to experience the worst impacts, climate change will be your humanitarian challenge as well.

The Paris Agreement notwithstanding, these dangerous climate impacts will continue to grow worse over the coming decades. We have little understanding

of how our human systems will hold up under climate stress. Global supply chains, finance and insurance markets, food and water distribution – these systems are complex, inter-linked, and form the foundation of our modern civilization.

Climate change raises some hard questions, and I am not sure we have the answers.

- Can we feed a planet of nine billion people when crop yields are projected to fall?

- Will we learn to share declining freshwater resources as the glaciers disappear?

- Will we be able to protect the millions who are rendered homeless when low-lying coastal areas are inundated?

- And can these and many other challenges be managed effectively so that we avoid a proliferation of failed states?

We are simply not prepared.

For this reason, Nauru calls Members to support the proposal by the Pacific Small Island Developing States to appoint a UN Special Representative on Climate & Security. The security implications of climate change will define this century and we must prepare.

Regarding the Security Council, Nauru supports expanding the number of permanent and non-permanent members in the Council. It is time to reflect the geopolitical realities of today, not seventy years ago. The persistence of the current arrangement continues to cast shadow of illegitimacy over everything we do at the United Nations. If we are to nurture the spirit of cooperation represented by the historic agreements of 2015, then we must reform the UN's most powerful organ. And we support the inclusion of India, Japan, Germany, Brazil and others in the permanent category.

Nauru welcomes the restored diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States. However, we call upon the U.S. to completely lift its economic embargo immediately.

Nauru is deeply concerned regarding the situation in West Papua, including the alleged human rights abuses. As emphasized in the Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué, it is important that there be an open and constructive dialogue with Indonesia on this matter.

Nauru is also concerned by the mounting tensions provoked by the recent actions of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The Pacific region saw far too much violence and suffering last century, and we must not allow the scourge of war to return. There is no place in a sustainable world for nuclear proliferation.

I would like to address the situation of Nauru's close friend, Taiwan. According to the UN Charter, our mission here is to "reaffirm faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small."

Mr. President, therefore, the twenty three million people of the Republic of China should enjoy these same fundamental rights. Taiwan has contributed to the World Health Assembly (WHA) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). They are promoting the Sustainable Development Goals domestically and internationally, and they are helping lead the way to a low-carbon economy.

Taiwan is a key stakeholder in the international community and we should make efforts to regularize their participation throughout the UN system so that we can all benefit from their substantial contributions.

Lastly, I would like to extend my country's deep appreciation for the work of the United Nations Secretary-General, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon. You have been a true friend of small islands, and we are thankful for your leadership on many of the issues we hold most dear. Raising climate change to the top of the international agenda will perhaps be your most enduring legacy, but just as

important has been your tireless efforts to ensure that no country is left behind – no matter how small. You were the first sitting Secretary-General to make an official visit to Pacific Small Island Developing States, and you have an open invitation to visit Nauru.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, we are at the crossroads at the United Nations. While the UN Charter is rooted in the equality of nations, we do not always live up to this principle. There are still times when only some of us hold the pen, some sit at the table, and some are locked out behind a closed door.

There is a small group of countries with the real power to give us that push to transform our world. They can make sure the resources are directed to where they matter. We need these countries to carry forward the goals and objectives we spent so many years negotiating, even in those exclusive rooms when the rest of us are not present.

The power of the 2030 (twenty-thirty) Agenda comes from its legitimacy. It was the product of a truly open and transparent process that reflects the hopes and aspirations of all one-hundred-and-ninety-three UN Members. We all sat at the table and held the pen together. I implore our partners to remember that.

Now, Mr. President, we are entrusting you to take this work forward and to hold us accountable for our commitments. From one Pacific Islander to another, you have our complete confidence.

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

Thank you.