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**General Assembly 78<sup>th</sup> session**

**Agenda item 8: General Debate**

**Statement by President Wesley W. Simina**

**New York, 21 September 2023**

**Check against delivery**

Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,

At the outset, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the 78<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly. I assure you of mine and my delegation's full support, and have every confidence that you will be successful in leading the General Assembly to a successful conclusion. I'd also like to express our appreciation to your distinguished predecessor, H.E. Csaba Kőrösi, for his service to the General Assembly, and to the UN Secretary-General H.E. Antonio Guterres for his bold and visionary leadership in steering the United Nations during these challenging times.

Mr. President,

We have just come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet our collective challenges have not diminished; but rather, we have faced a number of intersecting crises: From the adverse impacts of climate change to the decline in the health of our Ocean. From sustainable development to peace and security. I will briefly elaborate on them from the perspective of a Pacific Small Island Developing State; but I also want to highlight our opportunities. I will start with Climate Change.

**Climate Change Crisis**

Mr. President,

In 2015, the same year in which this body adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community also adopted the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change. Though far from perfect, the Paris Agreement represents a key tool to combat the climate crisis. The adoption of the Paris Agreement marked a high point of multilateralism, similar to this body's adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

Unfortunately, the international community has not done nearly enough to get us on track to limiting the global average temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius. One need only scan the news on any random day to see the evidence of the climate crisis in devastating effects around the world today.

Loss and damage caused by the climate crisis is accumulating every day in Micronesia, and it will continue to worsen at a faster pace as tipping points are reached. As the Secretary-General recently stated, we are now in an era of "global boiling."

We need a fast acting mandatory approach which should be modeled on the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the best environmental agreement ratified by every UN member state. We should use this work-horse treaty – the little engine that could – as a model for a new agreement to cut methane, the blowtorch pushing the planet from global warming to global boiling.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us that current nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, if fully implemented, will still lead to over 2 degrees Celsius of warming by the end of this century, with 3 degrees Celsius being a distinct possibility. This is an existential threat for my country and many other small island developing States. And yet, major emitters, including from the developing world, have yet to commit to updating their nationally determined contributions as part of this global stocktake in order to get us on a 1.5 degrees Celsius track.

This week, I joined my fellow Leaders in the High Ambition Coalition on Climate Change in issuing a statement with a strong call for action. In line with the statement, Micronesia strongly implores all Parties to the Paris Agreement – particularly major emitters from the developed and developing world – to commit by COP28 to major reductions of emissions of at least half by 2030, with peaking of emissions by 2025, and peg their net zero goals to no later than 2050, in line with the recommendations of the IPCC. As part of this effort, countries should eliminate the emissions of methane, HFCs, and other short-lived climate pollutants from their industrial products and activities, which altogether could result in the avoidance of at least 0.5 degree Celsius of global warming.

While Micronesia has negligible global emissions, it has bold ambitions to limit its emissions. Through our NDC Strategy, by 2030 we aim to reduce CO2 emissions from electricity generation by more than 65% below 2000 levels. By 2050 Micronesia will achieve 'net zero'. This bold pledge will result in a healthier, happier and climate resilient island nation.

The climate crisis is indeed impacting health security, food security, water security, economic security and peace security. It is without a doubt, an existential threat. We reiterate our call for the appointment of a Special Representative for Climate and Security to address these threats. We also call for the full operationalization of the new Loss & Damage Fund at COP 28, in order to equip those who are most affected by climate change to deal with the ongoing loss and damage impacts that are faced every day. It is time for those most responsible for climate change to put your money where your mouth is, for the cost of not doing so, is far greater than what could ever be quantified.

Additionally, Micronesia is proud to announce that we have recently adopted an amendment to our national constitution that recognizes the right of our people to a healthy environment. As custodians of our natural heritage, we adopted the amendment in part to underscore that this right is a general principle of international law applicable to all States, including major contributors to the climate crisis. We need all available tools to fight the climate crisis, including those provided to us under international law.

For this reason, Micronesia is proud to have been a member of the core group of countries that advocated for the adoption by this body of a resolution requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on obligations of States and consequences under international law in relation to climate change.

Countries like mine, and people like mine, ARE the frontlines of climate change. But we don't need more promises. What we need is action. For promises to turn into policy and for policy to turn into proactive steps towards real solutions. As islanders, resilience is in our DNA, but let me remind you that our resilience is not a placeholder for continued inaction.

## Ocean

Mr. President,

As a Big Ocean State, we recognize one clear truth: the Ocean is suffering from multiple stressors. It is the duty of the international community to address the sources of those stressors for the sake of present and future generations of humankind, as well as for the sake of the Ocean itself.

SDG 14 would not have been included in the 2030 Agenda if not for the sustained advocacy of Micronesia and other small island developing States, particularly from the Pacific. By the same token, the recent adoption of the BBNJ Agreement would not have been possible without the key contributions of Pacific small island developing States like Micronesia.

As Micronesia had actively engaged in the negotiation of the BBNJ Agreement, it is also committed to implementing it. **This is why I am honored to have been the first Head of State to sign the BBNJ Agreement, which I did yesterday on behalf of Micronesia.** I urge members of the UN and other world leaders to sign and ratify the Agreement, and also urge for the full implementation of SDG14 as soon as possible.

We also commit to doing our part in implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including with respect to the establishment of marine protected areas and similar measures for at least 30 percent of the global Ocean by 2030. Our work on the Micronesia Challenge, Blue Prosperity Micronesia and similar initiatives in our part of the world already contribute to that effort.

### **Sustainable Development**

Mr. President,

The 2030 Agenda is at its half-way point. We are not on track on a number of issues. I have already pronounced myself in more detail at the SDG Summit. But we also have opportunities. We have just completed preparatory meetings for the Fourth International Conference on SIDS. We expect the outcome of the Conference to be concise, action oriented, yet address our most pressing needs in partnership with the international community, including how internet connectivity can change life in the islands, by making telemedicine and remote learning available at every outlying island; and how transportation can be more sustainable if your only means of transport are boats. It is my hope that practical action will flow from the Conference, including to support the implementation of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

### **Gender Equality**

Mr. President,

Micronesia is a proud matrilineal society, where our clans, lineage, and land control are mainly passed down from generation to generation through women. This symbolizes the powerful role of women in our culture and society. Yet we recognize that historically women have had difficulty in attaining roles in leadership and decision making in government.

So Mr. President and Secretary General, I am pleased to report that finally, finally, there are women members currently serving in our national congress. And in my own administration I am committed to putting more women into leadership and decision making positions while continuing to meaningfully consult and engage women on matters of national importance, in order to strive for a more inclusive and equal Micronesia.

### **Ukraine War**

Mr. President,

Traditional threats to peace and security persist, making the principles of the UN all the more valuable to uphold. This is why Micronesia stands in solidarity with Ukraine and supports its independence within its internationally recognized borders. We also urge all Member States to cooperate to urgently address the adverse impacts of the war in Ukraine on food security, energy, and finance, including in small island developing States like my own that are vulnerable to such

impacts. We must find ways to put an end to this illegal war which continues to erode the credibility and integrity of this premier international body and the principles enshrined in its Charter we all agree to support.

### **UN Security Council Reform**

Mr. President,

This brings me to a related and most crucial point, the reform of the UN Security Council, which was put in place almost 80 years ago. The Security Council has become archaic and ineffective in addressing security challenges of our contemporary world, which are much more complicated, interlocking and interconnected, including the worsening and devastating impacts of climate change. As the Secretary General mentioned in his opening statement, “The world has changed. But our institutions have not.” Fellow leaders, the time for that change, is now.

The geopolitical dynamics that we face demand that we embrace change and adapt to the realities and dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Permanent membership of the Security Council must be expanded to include Japan, India, Germany and others; and non-permanent membership should be expanded as well, including a stand alone seat for small island developing States. These changes are needed in order to enhance the legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of the Council. The time for Security Council reform is now.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. President, in closing,

More than ever in the history of the United Nations, we urgently need to live up to our name, and fortify unity among nations, for the challenges of our time demands it of us. Our global community is interconnected; and interdependence among nations is reality. And so, no challenge can be solved by any one country or community alone. We must admit that we all need each other.

And so in addressing these challenges, we must remember that people lie at the heart of every solution – both as a driver and as a benefactor. As a global community we all gather here within these walls, because despite it all, we still believe that we can do better. We still have the audacity to reimagine a more just, safe and prosperous world that is worthy of the next generation.

I thank you for listening.