



**Remarks by His Excellency Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr.
President of the Republic of Palau
General Debate of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly
26th September 2018, New York**

Madame President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by congratulating Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés on her recent assumption of the Presidency of the General Assembly for its 73rd Session becoming only the 4th woman to take this seat and first woman representing her region. Palau welcomes you to this prominent role and I have no doubt that you will steer this Canoe as our Captain on our voyage towards Agenda 2030 at this most important of forums of multilateralism in a unique and effective way, as demonstrated by the theme of the current general debate - 'Making the United Nations Relevant to All People: Global Leadership and Shared Responsibilities for Peaceful, Equitable and Sustainable Societies.'

Let me also express my gratitude to His Excellency Minister Miroslav Lajčák for his exceptional service during his recently completed term, recognizing initiatives undertaken during his term: on financing for SDGs, on health issues such as NCDs, on water and youth among others.

At the outset, I would like to pay my respects to a great leader and great humanitarian: Our former UN Secretary General and Nobel Peace laureate, Kofi Annan. A friend and ally to all, Mr. Anan was the living embodiment of our mission to create peaceful, equitable, and sustainable societies. His contributions to building stronger and more effective international institutions laid the foundation for the important work we do today.

This year, we also celebrate the legacy of Nelson Mandela, which continues to inspire the poor and oppressed to demand equal rights. In honor of the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela, the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit was an historic opportunity to reaffirm our faith in the principle and values of the UN Charter.

Madame President,

The Republic of Palau is committed to promoting Peaceful, Equitable and Sustainable Societies both at home and internationally, and we see the Sustainable Development Goals as the most important framework for achieving our objective. The path that each country takes to achieve their goals will be unique, but we recognize that all are inter-linked and reinforce one another. For Palau, our core priorities are health, oceans, and climate change, through which the rest of our development objectives through genuine and durable partnerships will be realized.

Palau has declared 2018 as the Year of Good Health. At home we are implementing a number of events to raise awareness and cultivate healthier lifestyles to respond to the deadly problem of Non-Communicable Diseases NCDs. Palau is ranked in the top 10 most obese countries in the world and I am afraid to say that while in other parts of the world people are dying of hunger and poverty, in our corner of the Pacific, we are dying of overeating and poor diet.

The rise in diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and other NCDs are attributed to unhealthy diets, insufficient physical activity, excessive consumption of salt, sugar fat, alcohol and tobacco use. NCDs are now the leading causes of death in Palau. Up to 75% of us will die from NCDs prematurely.

This crisis has prompted a strategic shift in focus at the Ministry of Health of Palau toward increasing preventive services in an effort to improve the health and livelihood for our people. We are encouraging a return to traditional diets and increasing our local food production, as much of the problem stems from the importation of unhealthy junk food.

However, in the case of tuberculosis, I am very happy to report that incidences of tuberculosis have been minimal and well under control over the years.

Madame President,

The Ocean for my country is our livelihood, our culture and our identity, which is why achieving SDG 14 is so critical for us.

The ocean is also the foundation of our booming tourism industry, which will continue to be the largest jobs-provider in the country. We have launched a new campaign – “Pristine Paradise Palau.” – which places sustainability front and center.

I have a firm belief that our environment is our economy; our economy is our environment. Preserving our magnificent coral reefs and abundant fisheries will ensure tourism continues to grow, as well as protect our food security for generations to come. For this reason, we have moved aggressively to implement our National Marine Sanctuary – a no-take zone that covers 80% of our Exclusive Economic Zone. It is Palau's contribution to the global effort to achieve SDG 14. The value of the endemic marine biodiversity in Palau is priceless and therefore we are eager to work with the scientific community to identify more ways to build the resilience of our coral reef ecosystems.

We are proud of our domestic efforts, but international action remains essential. Last year, the world gathered here in this great hall and declared that the Ocean is sick and needs our unified global assistance to restore it to good health. This year, in response to this call for help, the Prime Minister of Norway, the Honorable Erna Solerberg and I, together with the Governments of Australia, Chile, Fiji, Ghana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Namibia, Portugal, and the UN Special Envoy for Oceans, launched the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy. This panel seeks solutions to building a transformative political agenda for Ocean Action and seek the development of a platform to deliver management and tracking of commitments, initiatives, partnerships including science-based monitoring of the Ocean, featuring national and private-sector leadership.

Palau is also seeking a strong outcome to the Intergovernmental Conference on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, which will be an important complement to our domestic actions.

Further on the horizon, my country will be proud to play host of the Our Oceans 2020 Conference. That same year, Portugal will host the United Nations Oceans Conference. We need to identify our priorities and catalyze new coalitions so that the year 2020 comes to be remembered as a year of action.

Madame President,

My Government also takes very seriously its contribution to the Paris Agreement, which is also integral to our plans for achieving SDG 13 and other relevant goals. Climate change is the greatest challenge of our generation. Just this month we once again saw the damage that record-breaking cyclones bring to vulnerable countries like Super Typhoon Mangkhut brought to the Philippines. Building the resilience of vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change must be an urgent global priority.

Palau has developed a Climate Change Policy Framework with the objectives of undertaking effective adaptation measures to deal with expected impacts of climate change, strengthen our capacity to prepare and minimize disaster risks, and mitigate climate change by working towards low carbon emission through clean energy initiatives. Meanwhile, we continue to work with our global and regional partners to build capacity and mainstream climate change into our national planning and budgeting process.

Small Island Developing States are making great strides in transforming their energy systems. As part of our vision for building a Pristine Paradise, Palau has adopted ambitious international commitments to increase its supply of renewable energy by harnessing the power of the sun and transforming our energy sector to receive 45% of our electricity from renewable sources by 2025. Smokestacks have no place in Paradise.

Our target represents an extremely ambitious undertaking, but we are confident that, with the right partners, we can achieve our goal. We take very seriously our responsibility to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions as part of the global effort to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. While Palau emits a miniscule fraction of the global aggregate, we believe that the example we set can inspire many others to act.

Earlier this year, we took a big step forward by passing a law which modernized our electricity sector to enable a rapid transition to renewable energy. And now we have the enabling framework to trigger investments in transforming our economy towards harnessing the power of the sun.

We can now envision that in the near future, the people and consumers will pay less cost for electricity and the financial savings will be distributed to areas where it is needed the most, for example health and education. One day very soon, visitors to our islands can be treated to not only a beautiful environment, but also a bold example of a more sustainable way of life.

Of course, all of this work depends on the dedication of our partners and their commitment to SDG17. Our ambitious goals can only be attained with strong international partnerships that respect our national priorities and our independence. Palau is fortunate to have many good friends and strong partners.

We continue to strengthen our relationship with the United States of America through the Compact of Free Association and we offer our gratitude for our unique relationship. We wish to give special thanks to the United States of America for the approval of the amended financial provisions of our Compact.

The Government of Japan has also provided generous support through the years, and I offer our sincere gratitude. Their friendship, assistance, and support continue to strengthen our economic and social undertakings.

We would like to express a special thanks to India for its recent efforts to expand and strengthen its partnership with my country. India has partnered with us to improve our Youth initiatives, stronger family projects, and this year I have declared 2018 as the year of good health of which India is now a big partner to reform our health sector.

We look forward to working through the Indo-Pacific Strategy for assistance in the patrolling our maritime areas. Cooperation in surveillance and enforcement of international law against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing will address a major challenge to sustainable fisheries, as well as improve regional security.

The Government of Australia remains a strong partner in our maritime surveillance and enforcement efforts. We also recognize their support to the development of our ICT sector through the World Bank.

The Republic of China, Taiwan has long been an ally in our efforts to achieve our sustainable development goals. This special friendship and generosity can be seen in our infrastructure investments, as well as continued assistance in health and education. We urge the United Nations to seek a solution to include Taiwan in all its process, including the International Civil Aviation Organization and the World Health Organization. My government firmly believes that Taiwan's inclusion in the UN system will greatly benefit the UN's work and its Sustainable development agenda towards 2030 and beyond.

Palau is fortunate to have gained many newer partners and friends, and I would like to also recognize the European Union, Italy, Indonesia, New Zealand, Russia, Thailand, Spain, Singapore, Korea, South Africa, and many others.

We remain committed to the need to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again. There exists an inextricable connection between testing and the elimination of nuclear weapons. The legacy of more than 2,000 nuclear tests has touched people and communities in many regions including the victims of the nuclear testing in the Pacific. Nuclear tests have negatively impacted the environment, human health, food security and economic development. Weapons of mass destruction have no place in this world and we urge achieving complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantling of such weapons and ballistic missiles of all ranges by North Korea. The

global community must adhere to the fulfillment and the implementations of the relevant United Nations Security Council resolution and uphold the international rule of law.

I would like to commend the Secretary-General Guterres for initiating the UN reforms, including the repositioning of the UN development system. Given the special status of our Small Island States in the context of vulnerability, remoteness and size, the reform underway is timely which also highlights the need for a strengthened role of UN Country Teams and of the Resident Coordinator system, along with setting up their permanent offices in the region. We must ensure that the smallest countries are able to fully participate in the development of reform plans.

Palau also reiterates its call, as a member of the Pacific Small Island Developing States, for the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Climate and Security, which would address a significant gap in the UN system.

Madame President,

Building Peaceful, Equitable and Sustainable Societies is no longer an aspirational ideal. It is an absolute necessity for addressing the very grave economic, environmental, and humanitarian challenges facing the world. Palau stands with you as we begin this 73rd session and as we continue working on this critical endeavor.

Thank you.