



Republic of Nauru

Statement by His Excellency President Baron Divavesi Waqa, M.P.

73rd United Nations General Assembly, New York

Wednesday, 26th September 2017

Thank you, Madam President,

It is an honor to be here for the opening of the seventy-third (73rd) session of the United Nations General Assembly. On behalf of the Republic of Nauru, I would like to congratulate Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés on her recent assumption of the Presidency of the General Assembly.

I would also like to thank His Excellency Minister Miroslav Lajčák for his exceptional work as our outgoing President.

Madam President,

Your chosen theme for this year's debate -- 'Making the United Nations Relevant to All People'-- is deeply resonant with this representative of a Small Island Developing State. It is so self-evident that it borders on cliché to state that some communities have not benefitted from the current global economic system. And yet it bears repeating, again and again, lest these places be forgotten entirely. The Republic of Nauru is one such place, and it is to the United Nations that we look for assistance.

However, to be responsive to the needs of my country and many others like it, we must address a systemic bias within the United Nations and start thinking small.

The population of Nauru is a little over ten thousand people. Let me try to capture the challenges of accessing the support available from the United Nations by sharing a story from my days as Director of Education. Eager to participate in an education data tracking programme offered by UNESCO, I logged into their website and began to input the required information for registering my country. The first question was straight forward: Number of primary schools. I typed in the number six. Not *six hundred (600)*. Not *six thousand (6,000)*. *Six (6)*.

ERROR

I moved on to the second question: Number of teachers. I typed in fifty-nine (59).

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[pause]

I was not able to register for that promising education programme. But I did learn an important lesson that day: It is not easy to access support from the UN system when you are representing a small country.

Our unique challenges as SIDS are widely recognized. Some are inherent in the geophysical nature of the islands we inhabit, such as small land mass, limited natural resources, geographic isolation, and vulnerability to natural disasters. No less important are the challenges imposed on us by the global economic system, which was not designed with our countries in mind.

Our small populations and production base do not yield the economies of scale sought by private investors. Volatility in commodity markets have outsized impacts on our fiscal planning. And the negative externalities of consumption-based economic growth have destroyed the health of our oceans and the safety of our climate. Meanwhile, corporate consolidation and a liberalized global financial system translate into fewer, and fewer opportunities for small enterprises to develop domestically.

This leaves us with extremely under-developed economies – overly-reliant on one or two key sectors that are often highly vulnerable to changing global market trends or shifts in the political priorities of our development partners. SIDS typically score extremely high economic vulnerability indexes for this reason. And Nauru is no different. While we may be considered a middle-income country today under certain metrics, our economic situation could change dramatically for the worse overnight, because of forces completely out of our hands.

These are not new observations. We have been grappling with these challenges for decades. But in the face of climate change, developing effective strategies for dealing with them has become much more urgent.

I think it is fair to say that the logic of the entire global economic system is driven by the relentless pursuit of larger and larger scale. In the name of efficiency, private enterprises expand operations in places with large pools of cheap labor or vast reserves of resources. They merge with competitors to increase market share. They seek out the greatest profit centers and abandon those that underperform. Talk to any newly-minted MBA about a new business idea and the first question they will ask is: “Does it scale?”

I dare say that this logic has permeated the United Nations system. Why design a programme to help a country of *ten thousand* when you can theoretically help *ten million*? Why wade through all the loan paperwork to replace a small diesel generator when the same number of

documents can mobilize funding to transform a much larger energy system? If my country is too small to even warrant inclusion in a simple online database, then where does that leave us?

For the smallest countries – the microstates – conventional pathways to development are not available to us. We simply cannot offer the profit potential that private investors are seeking. And therefore, we must look to public institutions – to the United Nations – to create an environment in which the rest of us can grow and prosper. The Republic of Nauru cannot be treated as an ERROR.

When viewed through the lens of conventional economics, our lack of scale *is* our problem. Therefore, if we are to address the challenges of small islands, we have to abandon the conventional wisdom. We have to think about scale differently. Once we take that leap, our small size can become our greatest advantage.

Madam President,

Earlier this month, Nauru had the honor to host the forty ninth Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting. The theme of the meeting was: “Building a Strong Pacific: Our People, Our Islands, Our Will,” which was chosen to highlight the uniqueness of our region, and the imperative that we chart our own course to sustainable development. Traditional and new partners alike joined us in the Pacific’s first SDG17 Roundtable to announce new initiatives in the areas of energy, healthcare, and oceans protection. The event was successful because our partners recognized our vulnerabilities and our genuine needs, and they saw the opportunities that assistance will provide to sustain our people and our islands. However, there are those who have their own agendas for their own interests and benefits and it is most unfortunate when they impose their will and arrogance on the Pacific people. Those who disrespect the conduct and the will of Pacific Leaders must understand that they will be disregarded. The Pacific Islands Forum is a forum for the Pacific people and it is imperative that this is understood and respected.

Ladies and gentlemen, small can be nimble. Small means that modest resources can yield transformative impacts. When our sustainability metrics are aggregated with the rest of the world, we become nothing more than a rounding error. But when joined by partners prepared to understand our constraints, we can become vibrant demonstrations that a better, more sustainable way of life is possible.

Take renewable energy. A few small islands have made enormous progress in the past few years and are looking to achieve 100% renewable energy systems within a decade – a tremendous achievement. This is a much more difficult undertaking in large countries, which must serve population centers spread across a much wider geographical area, navigate a minefield of politically powerful incumbents, and bear much higher financial costs.

We can see some of our Pacific island neighbors racing to the front, and the rest of us are clamoring to follow their lead. We are ready to seize the opportunity presented by cheap solar

and free ourselves from the expensive burden of fossil fuels. Capacity and resource constraints are the only things holding us back.

My government's own analysis puts the cost of moving Nauru to 100% renewable energy at Sixty-Three Million Dollars (US\$63 million). For a modest investment, the world would have visible evidence that the future we want – a clean, zero-carbon society – is well within our grasp. This transformation would also dramatically improve our fiscal outlook, providing a much stronger foundation for progress in other areas of sustainable development.

Just because the task is smaller does not mean it is easy. But there are simple steps that can be taken, which would dramatically improve our situation. Financial and capacity building resources need to be made more accessible for our capacity-constrained countries. Streamlined and harmonized application and reporting procedures would significantly alleviate one of the largest hurdles. In addition, new funding approaches, such as direct access modalities and direct budgetary support, seem to be yielding much better results in small countries. And adequate financing must be available for basic infrastructure, not just for the development fads of the moment.

The Pacific's partnership with the Government of Italy has been a resounding success because it has been structured with these issues in mind. The model works because it places the Pacific islands as the primary drivers of their own development. When working with the Government of Italy we know that the tremendous scale of respect that they have shown us has nothing to do with the size of our country.

Madame President,

Building a more inclusive United Nations also requires addressing the most urgent global challenges, which include the security implications of climate change. In this regard, I would like to reiterate the call I made in July at the UN Security Council for the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Climate and Security. We are already seeing dangerous impacts on our countries and communities, with the most vulnerable among us bearing the greatest burden. A Special Representative, supported by a well-resourced staff, is needed to help us start managing climate risks more effectively. There is a critical gap in the UN system that must be filled immediately.

Madam President,

Making the United Nations relevant to all people must include the people of Taiwan. The people of Taiwan should be treated equally to those of other nations. The UN should resolve the serious issue of Taiwan's Twenty-Three million (23 million) people being excluded from the UN system. The preamble of the UN Charter clearly states that the organization's mission is to, and I quote, "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small" end of quote.

In closing, I would like to thank the Governments of Australia, Taiwan, New Zealand, Japan, India the Russian Federation, Italy, Israel, Cuba and the European Union for their assistance to Nauru. We value your friendship very much and look forward to our continued collaboration.

Madam President,

We applaud you for choosing to promote a theme of inclusion at this debate. In the pursuit of scale, it is easy to forget that many of the smallest and most vulnerable often fall through the cracks. My Government stands ready to work with you during this 73rd session of the General Assembly to build a United Nations that brings Peaceful, Equitable and Sustainable Societies to all people.

God bless the Republic of Nauru, God bless the United Nations and God bless you all.

Thank you.