



Office of the President

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

H.E. Ms. Hilda Heine
President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly
General Debate
New York 25 September 2018

check against delivery

Madame President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies,

I have the honor to bring you the warm greetings of Yokwe on behalf of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

In its best moments, the United Nations has served as a common platform for every nation – but especially for the most vulnerable. At present – nations are pulling in new directions, stretching the threads which hold us all together, and pushing the world to the edge.

It is imperative that the member states of the United Nations continue to unite behind an international rules-based order which does not overlook the voices of the most vulnerable peoples. As a former United Nations Strategic Trusteeship, the Marshall Islands can speak with authority from our own history – of the times where the blunt will of the most powerful ravaged our shores, and the moments where the common concern of humanity failed us, as well as those times where it ensured – that our Marshallese voices mattered.

We welcome engagement with the world's largest powers – but they must have our best island interests at heart.

Madame President,

Human rights stands as a challenging universal ideal – which all must aspire to – and uphold. The UN Human Rights Council has tremendous potential to lend transparency, dialogue and progress. While we must take more time to carefully connect global norms and national implementation – because one size never fits all – the United Nations must never hesitate to stand up to actors who would seek to evade what everyone else might see as common decency. And this is not an abstract statement - from our own history, and our contemporary challenges, the Marshall Islands knows the dire consequences which arise when the international community might look the other way because of political expediency. Far more political will is needed to ensure no one is truly left behind. Whatever the shortcomings of the UN Human Rights Council, it is on the shoulders of member states to address – we have to fix it ourselves. And we will not stand by in silence.

For these reasons, the Republic of the Marshall Islands has put forward its candidacy for the Human Rights Council in the term 2020 to 2022.

Real commitment is in actions – not in words. As an example – we have not only enacted disability rights legislation to meet our treaty obligations, but we currently have a bill before parliament which amends over 100 existing statutes to ensure we mainstream rights across all sectors. And we are moving towards a similar undertaking on gender. Our partners, including UNESCAP, have already been key sources of assistance, but it is our political will which can make this a reality. Human rights is not just treaty signatures, it is a visible step-change in our local communities.

Madame President,

Small nations can have a unique role within the multilateral system. We would not have the UN Law of the Sea, or the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and a great many other outcomes – but for the political will of SIDS. We are a quarter of this body's membership.

But – does the UN system invest equally in us? We will struggle to tackle the SDGs unless there is urgent attention to both our own data capacity and its use by the international system. Many of our core social development indicators sit stagnant – and while we are trying to change all of this, we cannot do so without an international system directly focused on our unique character.

I strongly support the Secretary-General's initiative for UN system reform – to do more, and do it better, with the resources at hand. Our present UN Resident Coordinator is not a resident at all, and faces an impossible task to effectively serve 10 remote nations at once. I look forward to the upcoming review of the UN's multi-country offices, mandated in resolution 72/279, and urge innovative solutions. And this year is a key opportunity for the UN system to make the SAMOA Pathway for SIDS a real opportunity for system change.

Madame President,

Decades ago, small island developing states warned the world of the risks of climate change – and those were once theoretical threats. Now we must spend time on advocacy – time which we literally do not have. The Paris Agreement stands strong as a powerful and united legal commitment from all – the largest and smallest among us – to spare no effort in doing more to ensure a rise of no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius.

I strongly affirm the 2019 Secretary-General's Climate Summit. At the highest levels, this is an urgent opportunity for leaders to reshape headlines, and put the Paris Agreement into motion by responding to the urgent need for enhanced action and ambition at true scale.

This is not just a moral promise – but an economic reality, as energy markets already point the way towards better choices. But I am not asking of others what we will not do at home, and this week I have announced the Marshall Islands is transitioning to a net zero emissions target by 2050.

We are already taking action to not only meet this goal, but also to increase our near-term ambition, as well as to accelerate adaptation efforts.

In raising our ambition, I know we will not be alone. The Pacific Island Forum Leaders in last month's Boe Declaration have declared climate change as the single greatest security threat to our region. This political will must extend to urgent and prioritized assistance to atoll nations like the Marshall Islands – whose very survival is at risk – to help adapt to climate-driven threats we already face, and to avoid a future tipping point only a decade or two away. Much more political effort is needed on the scale and

targeting of climate finance - so good intentions from partners can make a visible impact in local communities.

As a low-lying atoll island nation – little more than one meter above sea-level – the future of the Marshall Islands hangs in the balance. But it is not just us, even if as an atoll nation we are the most vulnerable – we are joined not only by other small island developing states, but many other countries who face serious challenges posed by climate impacts.

As President of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, I call on every leader in the world to join me this November 22nd in an online virtual summit to ensure that no one – and no country – is left behind.

For the Marshall Islands, we emerged from the colonial period, World War Two and the impacts of nuclear testing conducted more than 6 decades ago. During the adoption of our Constitution in 1979 and becoming a UN member state in 1991, we were focused entirely on building a nation to leave behind for our children. Only 27 years later, now facing the consequences of climate change – we are now asking ourselves - what legacy will we leave as a nation for our grandchildren to inherit?

Madame President,

The UN Oceans Summit last year has set the stage to ensure that oceans – two thirds of the world's surface – must no longer be an isolated silo, but will be an integral part of sustainable development and global commitment. The Marshall Islands is *more than* 99 percent ocean.

It is our culture, our primary economic pathway, and our identity. The world must move far beyond words, and into actions, because we all must be gravely alarmed at what has too often become a downward spiral.

Earlier this year, the eight Pacific leaders of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement met in the Marshall Islands, the first such leaders meeting since 2010. In the intervening years, we have rewrote the playbook of global tuna markets – working to ensure this will not only be an economic lifeline for our future generations, but remain a valuable source of global food security and the world's largest sustainable purse seine tuna fishery

In this regard, I welcome the outreach and engagement of G7 leaders to focus on oceans and fisheries, under the leadership of Canada. International development finance sources need to improve delivery of targeted direct support. Marine plastic pollution is crippling global waters, and illegal fishing in the Pacific is more than a violation of law and treaty – but a major regional security issue.

Next week, the Marshall Islands will host the launching of a regional initiative for an IUU Free Pacific, to eradicate illegal fishing from our region. Enhanced efforts on illegal fishing are needed by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, and we should not be afraid to name and shame the worst offenders.

Madame President,

As the first woman head of state or government in the independent Pacific islands region, it is vital that the UN accelerate efforts to ensure that all women – and especially our youngest generations – must see that they have a rightful role at all levels of decision-making, including the highest levels of political leadership and economic development. As women – we are, after all – half of the world's population,

and we are not yet fully reflected in the ranks of global leaders.

Madame President,

For too many years, multilateral discussions to end nuclear weapons have gone in circles. I strongly welcome progress whenever it is found – and I remain cautiously optimistic of efforts towards a safe and secure Korean peninsula – with complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization. But until that is achieved, the Marshall Islands strongly affirms its commitment to the full implementation of the UN Security Council's sanctions, including in the maritime sector.

Threats of atmospheric testing in the Pacific ocean are of obvious concern to me and my fellow Pacific island leaders – and for every Marshallese citizen, the impacts of nuclear testing are not just a historical legacy, but a contemporary reality. These were the only instances where the UN ever explicitly authorized the testing of nuclear weapons, and the consequences are horrific. The 67 nuclear weapons tests conducted between 1946 and 1958, have produced impacts through generations.

These took place during our status as a United Nations Strategic Trust Territory, including testing authorized by UN Trusteeship resolutions 1082 and 1493. This is a burden which no other nation or people should ever bear. This is not only a lesson which the world must learn, but a situation where the United Nations has already offered its assistance.

My government has recently established the national nuclear commission to work carefully with affected local communities, and also regional and international agencies, to better elaborate our complex issues, and to develop a strategy for nuclear justice. It is vital that all possible efforts are accelerated to help us address the human rights and the environment of our affected people.

Madame President,

The Security Council – and the United Nations as a whole – must adapt and change – we are no longer the world of seven decades ago.

It is important to realize UN Security Council reform, and to launch text-based negotiations towards Security Council reform during this session of the General Assembly.

Madame President,

Decolonization and human rights are both important issues in the Pacific islands region. I strongly affirm the position of the Pacific Island Forum Leaders in recognizing the constructive engagement by Forum countries with Indonesia with respect to elections and human rights in West Papua, and the commitment to continue dialogue in an open and constructive manner.

Madame President,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands supports the recognition of Taiwan's meaningful participation within the UN system, including programs and agencies, such as ICAO, the WHO and UNFCCC.

The people of Taiwan deserve equal treatment, and the UN should resolve the serious issue of Taiwan's 23 million people being excluded from the UN system – an issue we believe is not addressed in UN General Assembly Resolution 2758. Taiwan has been implementing the SDGs and has released a

voluntary national review. It has the capacity to contribute to a wide range of UN programs relevant to global progress. Diseases like tuberculosis know no boundaries, and Taiwan has brought its policy framework in line with global efforts. Taiwan has served as a primary partner for my own nation in addressing Non Communicable Diseases, which are now at crisis levels. Blocking Taiwan's participation does not benefit global human welfare.

Madame President,

In closing, it is imperative that – as the truly United Nations - we all take to heart the national motto of the Republic of the Marshall Islands – Jepilpilin ke Ejukaan – which translates as “accomplishment through joint effort.” What we do as leaders at the UN – and beyond – is a legacy for the next generation, and those who follow.

Thank you and kommel tata.