



Republic of the Marshall Islands

Statement by H.E. Litokwa Tomeing,
President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands,
At the General Debate of the 64th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly

New York, 24 September 2009

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*Mr. President,
Heads of State and Government,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen...*

I bring the greetings and best wishes of the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. I congratulate you, **Mr. President**, on your election as chair of the Session. You have our confidence and support. My gratitude to the United Nations for its continuing role in coordinating and leading this collective body through challenges affecting the interests of all nations.

The presence of the UN joint offices in the Marshall Islands has brought the ideals of this body closer to our people and country. Our hope is that other UN agencies including WHO, UNIFEM, FAO, and ESCAP will follow suit and make their presence felt more prominently, producing concrete results on the ground.

I wish to acknowledge your personal commitment, Mr. Secretary General, to the challenges of climate change. Your reminder to take our best to the table in Copenhagen in service to a higher calling to save the planet is well noted.

Your call for a clear moral imperative for bold and decisive urgent action, your recognition of the duty of the larger economies to the most vulnerable has not gone unnoticed by us small island states.

Although some may consider as insufficient the G8 commitment in Italy this year, I believe it is an encouraging and a necessary step forward.

Mr. President,

We cherish the hope that the United States' increasing participation in debates on issues relating to climate change, is a signal of its intention to take its rightful place in the forefront of the global war against climate change. Likewise, we are encouraged by Japan's bold and new commitment to address the adverse effects of climate change.

Let me express my appreciation to the Alliance of Small Island States for its leadership in assisting small island developing countries in preparation for negotiations in Copenhagen. We assure AOSIS of our unwavering support.

The world has its eyes full of expectation on Copenhagen. It will be an event of historical significance where everyone can now view the entire planet through a common perspective, despite our differences.

A few weeks away now from Copenhagen, I feel moved to ask at this point, as to what is it that we want to see happening in Copenhagen? What kind of outcome do we expect emerging? How should we and future generations judge the success of Copenhagen?

The answer, it seems to me, **Mr. President**, is a matter of perspective.

Major economies will, no doubt, be watchful that Copenhagen does not disturb too much an established way of life and all its benefits. I ask these nations to consider the implicit moral obligation that comes with their privileged and affluent status.

For the small island states, however, the question is whether Copenhagen will diminish or enhance their security and their chances of survival. Whether the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Tokelau and others should make haste, evacuate, and head on to safer regions – as foreshadowed in a recent warning from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Our message therefore to the leaders in Copenhagen is clear: We appeal to you to strive every nerve to increase your level of commitment to climate change; to show the world by your deeds and not words, your

unbending commitment to secure an effective post-Kyoto global agreement.

We appeal to you to be as unrestrained as the wind and set the limit of increase in global average temperature beyond pre-industrial period at a level to ensure our survival. We appeal to you to be fair-minded and to act with determination to reduce global emissions by at least 85 percent by 2050 from 1990 levels. We appeal to you to ensure that global emissions peak no later than 2015. Finally, we appeal to you, leaders of all nations, to construct in Copenhagen the ark of salvation in which all nations and people will find shelter.

I believe, **Mr. President**, that ultimately, the success of Copenhagen will be judged by the extent to which small, low-lying island states – the most vulnerable- will feel a guaranteed sense of safety and security. For, in our interdependent global community, the moral duty of the collective must always be the protection of the most vulnerable and the weak.

Short of this, however, Copenhagen will be no more than the continuation of the law of the jungle- the survival of the strongest. It will be a moral and political failure, for Copenhagen is not about mathematics. It is not about raw power. It is not competition for the survival of the few. It is about unleashing moral and political forces and synergies inherent in the collective body of nations for the good of all. What else does political will mean but this?

Failure in Copenhagen will make a mockery of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. For, their achievement will be beyond our capacity to attain. It will question the ability of the UN Charter to safeguard our pre-existing sovereign rights.

In short, the world and the most vulnerable cannot afford the price of failure.

Closer to home, even though the Marshall Islands' rate of emission is insignificant in relative terms, we have set for ourselves a reduction target of 40 percent by 2020. Over the years, and subject to accessibility of funding, we have been pursuing a systematic program of

using solar power. Nearly 40 percent of the households in our outer islands are now drawing on this power as one of their main sources of energy.

We intend to pursue this initiative until all the thirty-three islands in our country are fully covered. On the Micronesian sub-regional front, we are committed to the goals of the Micronesia Challenge.

Mr. President,

Our adaptation efforts continue to suffer from the lack of adequate funding, compounded by the sheer complexity in accessing it from their sources. Simplifying the process by direct access to these sources can enable us to fast-track some of our adaptation priorities such as sea-walls, coastal management, and safe water projects.

Mr. President,

I now turn to a matter which is very dear to the heart of every Marshallese. We are deeply encouraged by the UN Security Council Session today, moderated by President Obama, on Nuclear Weapons Use and Testing. Nuclear weapon testing was conducted on our islands between 1946 and 1958, at the time when we were a ward of the UN Trusteeship System.

Our first hand experience as victims of nuclear weapons testing on our islands, and the painful memories that continue to haunt us over six decades, are nightmares we would not wish on anyone. The toll on human sufferance and environmental damage has been devastating. Sixty years now since the detonation of some 67 nuclear bombs, the Marshall Islands is still grappling with their after-effects. Complete recovery in terms of restoring affected islands to full economic productivity, and adequate compensation of the victims remain uncertain.

Mr. President,

We have not come here to condemn or to point fingers. However, we are compelled by our moral duty to humanity to raise our voice in gatherings such as these, and to appeal to the conscience of the world community. We call for the formulation of a new perspective by which the specter of war and the use of nuclear weapons may forever be

wiped off the surface of the earth. Banning nuclear weapons alone will not remove the root cause of war. Important as it may be, it does not exert an enduring influence. People are too ingenious to invent yet other forms of warfare. Political agreements or good intentions alone are not enough. The world craves for something much more deep-seated than pure pragmatism. They yearn for permanent peace that springs from an inner state supported by a moral attitude.

Mr. President,

There is no lack of recognition by national leaders of the nature of the problem. But there is a paralysis of will. The stark realities of the experience of the people of the Marshall Islands have deepened our profound conviction that in a world irreversibly moving towards a global society, it becomes imperative that we recast our perspective. A perspective in which national impulses and interests, far from being disloyal to the nation, will find their fuller expression when subordinated to the needs and interests of the planet- our collective homeland.

Mr. President,

Amidst our deepening economic and financial woes, the Republic of the Marshall Islands continues to remain buoyant through the generous support of our friends and partners. Our special relations with the United States within the framework of the Compact of Free Association provides a unique partnership that is enduring and stable. We express our firm support of the effort of United States and allies in combating terrorism, and are proud of our young Marshallese men and women serving in the armed forces of the United States. The support provided as well by Japan, Republic of China Taiwan, the European Union, Australia and our other donor partners, are sincerely acknowledged.

Mr. President,

The increasing complexity in the management of evolving global affairs demands a reconstitution in the membership of the Security Council. Japan's distinguished leadership and achievements in the area of human security meet its aspiration to seek a permanent seat on the Council and thus deserve favorable consideration. Evidence of progress in the confidence building process between China and ROC Taiwan deserves praise and encouragement from the international community. Taiwan's

membership in the UN specialized agencies will enable its 23 million people play an active part in the affairs of the family of nations.

Mr. President,

Not a single nation can escape from the powerful grip of the challenges of climate change. Its deadly virus is here already. The remedy is clear: collective and resolute action. Now more than ever. The choice is ours.

We implore Almighty God to give us courage and wisdom. Thank you.