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Address by Vice President Yosiwo George

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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me at the outset congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming your role as presiding officer over this august body. I also congratulate your predecessor, Ambassador Peter Thomson of Fiji for a job well done for the past year. I must also mention our distinguished Secretary-General Mr. Antonio Guterres. In the few months since attaining the leadership of our Organization, he has already shown himself to be more than equal to the tremendous tasks associated with his high office.

As we gather here today in this great Hall of the United Nations, natural disasters and calamities are striking in many parts of our world. Hurricanes, typhoons and earthquakes have devastated communities and displaced thousands of people in just these past few days. To the victims and families around the world, I offer our sympathies and condolences on behalf of the people and the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia.

We condemn the loss of innocent lives to terrorist attacks. Micronesia pledges its resolve to stand united against terrorism in solidarity with affected nations. On behalf of the Micronesian Government and people, I offer our deepest condolences to all those nations and families who have suffered losses at the hands of terrorists.

Mr. President,

As we witness recent record-breaking “mega storms”, we cannot ignore the connections to climate change, especially to ocean warming and sea-level rise. In the wake of these devastating events, we must not only stay committed to our collective fight against climate change, we must double our efforts.

Climate change is one of the most serious threats to global peace and security, threatening the very existence of our islands. It needs to be at the top of the agenda of the General Assembly. As the United Nations undertakes efforts to reorient around the priorities of peace and prevention, the UN system will have to adapt. In this regard, we reiterate our call for the appointment of a Special Representative on Climate Change and Security.

Climate change mitigation is also essential to achieve the goals and targets of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, including eradication of poverty, ending hunger, building resilient infrastructure and shared prosperity. Without progress in fighting climate change, our sustainable development efforts will be futile. This is particularly true for small island developing states.

The Paris Agreement has provided an avenue to enhance cooperation in our fight against climate change, and the world must seize the moment. Micronesia expresses grave concern that some countries have chosen to break with the international community and neglect the Paris Agreement, contrary to all of the best scientific advice. As a small island developing nation at the forefront of the battle, Micronesia calls on all States to fully engage in global efforts to implement the Paris Agreement, to support the Green Climate Fund, and to contribute innovative climate solutions.

Mr. President,

I would like to share with you a story of global cooperation at its finest. This is a story of a treaty that was designed to save the ozone layer - and succeeded - but has also ended up making a major contribution to climate change mitigation.

The Montreal Protocol is considered the most successful multilateral environmental treaty of all time. That is why the 194 parties to the Protocol met last year in Kigali, Rwanda and agreed to amend the Montreal Protocol and expand its scope. Specifically, the Kigali Amendment allows the Protocol to regulate HFCs, which are chemicals used in refrigeration and air conditioning that can contribute significantly to global warming. Phasing down the use of HFCs will help avoid 0.5 degrees Celsius of global temperature rise, and complementary energy efficiency measures in this same sector could help avoid another 0.5 degrees of warming.

We thank the parties to the Montreal Protocol who have already ratified the Kigali Amendment, totaling eight out of the twenty needed for the agreement to enter into force. We call on the other parties to ratify the agreement as soon as possible, ideally before the next Meeting of the Parties in Canada in November.

Along with the Paris Agreement, the Kigali Amendment is a major step towards survival of small island states. As the story of the Kigali Amendment demonstrates, with intelligence, perseverance, and cooperation, we can achieve anything. This is the motivation that keeps us all working together for a better future.

Mr. President,

In the islands, we say the ocean is us, as we are the ocean.

As an island nation, Micronesia fully supported and participated actively in the UN Ocean Conference in June. The Call for Action from that conference, entitled “Our Ocean, Our Future,” highlights the actions required to achieve the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14. Micronesia supports the intent to organize a second UN Ocean Conference in 2020. This will enable us to follow-up on the commitments made at the first conference and to assess our progress towards full implementation of SDG14 by 2030. We look forward to the work of the Special Envoy for the Ocean to maintain the momentum.

At the recent Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Samoa, our leaders endorsed “The Blue Pacific” identity as the core driver of collective action in the Pacific region. This was a fitting progression from last year’s “Pohnpei Oceans Statement”, as elements of The Blue Pacific narrative reinforce the potential for shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean.

We must now show ambition in tackling the mounting threats to the health of our Ocean. The special case of small island developing states must be enshrined in the forthcoming implementing agreement under the UN Law of the Sea Convention on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (or “BBNJ”). We welcome the successful conclusion of the Preparatory Committee, and now we must urgently launch and conclude the intergovernmental conference to draft and adopt a new legally binding agreement.

Mr. President,

For Pacific islands, fisheries are a mainstay of our economies, our most important renewable natural resource and an integral part of our sustainable development plans. Effective conservation and management of our tuna resources is not only important for us who depend on it for our livelihoods and sustainable development but also for addressing global food security concerns. We must remain steadfast in our efforts to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in all its forms.

I also want to take this opportunity to express our concerns about the lack of recognition, and respect, of the rights of coastal states such as Micronesia to manage fisheries in their own exclusive economic zones. In the Western and Central Pacific, some developed country fishing nations, are advocating for flag based rights in regional fisheries management organizations. Such measures would undermine existing zone based management measures and erode the ability of small island developing states as resource owners to exercise their sovereign rights under international law. This would not be an acceptable outcome. Therefore, we call on these developed country partners to withdraw all such proposals and to actively support the efforts of small island developing states to increase benefits from the sustainable management of fisheries in their EEZs.

Mr. President,

Allow me to briefly thank our Secretary-General for his proposals on the peace and security architecture, management reform and other reform processes of our Organization. We commend his proposals that will result in a more transparent, efficient and effective regime that can respond to the challenges our world is facing today. Our United Nations must be fit for purpose. While reforms are vital to any Organization, they must leave no one behind and must not disadvantage small island developing states.

For many years now, a small island developing state like mine has also paid priority attention to the efforts to reform the United Nations Security Council. But the countless hours spent meeting and stating and re-stating positions have resulted in little progress. We need to break out of this cycle. It is high time to shift to real negotiations.

Mr. President,

In the Western Pacific, and most especially in our greater Micronesian region, the provocative and aggressive actions by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) pose a threat to regional security and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Micronesia supports the actions taken by the Security Council. We call on the Council and countries with the power and influence to help resolve this crisis to take action immediately to ensure peace is achieved on the Korean Peninsula.

In conclusion,

We gather in this great Hall and debate among nations, but we are speaking for our peoples. We are trying to advance their interests. We are seeking to improve their lives. As history has taught us, we will all fail our nations and our peoples unless we work together for the common good. Consistent with that principle, the theme of this session of the General Assembly is Focusing on People: Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet.

We must believe in such a future and strive towards it together. Multilateralism and the United Nations are more important than ever. Only together can we restore and maintain peace and security. Only together can we overcome the threat of global climate change. Only together can we build a sustainable future for the planet and all of our peoples.

Thank you.