



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
New York**

**72nd United Nations General Assembly – General Debate
Hon. Mr. John Silk
Minister of Foreign Affairs & Trade
Republic of the Marshall Islands
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Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen,

I have the honor to convey the warm greetings of Yokwe on behalf of the government and people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Mr. President,

I congratulate you on your election, and I am proud that your predecessor from the Pacific, Peter Thomson, will continue his service to the UN as the oceans envoy.

I also extend the condolences of my government for the destruction and tragic loss from recent natural disasters in Mexico, the United States, Antigua & Barbuda, Cuba, Haiti, the Bahamas, Dominica, Haiti, the territories of the US and British Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, St. Barth, Anguilla, Turks & Caicos, and other islands.

Mr. President,

The United Nations stands strong as the only place that we – all of us in the world, have to meet our starkest challenges together. Even if present moments in the world appear uncertain, all must remain confident and committed to ensure this body will speak for those who might not otherwise have such a voice.

Mr. President,

Recent events regarding North Korea and its growing nuclear threat must serve as an obvious mandate for strong and urgent global cooperation and effective action. The Marshall Islands is a small island nation in the Pacific – and, by ourselves, we wish for only peace, security and stability for the world. We cannot ignore the sudden and evident threat to the territory of Guam, our close neighbor, friend, and the home of some of our Marshallese citizens. A threat posed to Guam is a threat to the wider Pacific Islands region. And we further express our serious concern for the challenges these actions have posed to the peace, security and political cooperation across the wider Pacific rim.

The government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands at its highest levels loudly condemns the recent nuclear test of September 3rd, and related actions – without debate, these are clear violations of UN Security Resolutions, and are serious challenges to the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime based on the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. I am appalled that – of all countries - the Marshall Islands – is *again* facing the very real threat of an atmospheric nuclear test over the Pacific ocean.

Mr. President,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands has condemned these testing efforts not just for our own security, but because we know the impacts firsthand. The 67 nuclear tests in my country – conducted between 1946 and 1958 – have produced a legacy burden which we hope no other nation or people should ever have to bear. These tests were conducted under our UN Trusteeship – a time when this institution was charged with our welfare and well-being. When our Marshallese leaders traveled to New York to present two petitions to urgently halt nuclear testing – in 1954 and 1956 – the UN responded with Trusteeship Resolutions 1082 and 1493, which are the only time any UN organ has ever specifically authorized nuclear tests. The consequences of this ignorance were – and are – beyond horrific.

Our people and environment have suffered as no other people should – and these legacy impacts remain today as stark and present challenges, passed down through generations of mother to daughter, father to son. For these reasons, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights & Toxic Waste in 2012 outlined clear human rights implications and responsibilities – which we affirm.

Mr. Secretary-General, I thank you for your letter to the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum this August, stating that “finding a solution to this issue is critical for the future of the Republic of the Marshall Islands,” and assuring us that relevant UN entities stand ready to respond to requests for assistance.

Mr. President,

Recent events should create far greater political resolve to curb and ultimately eliminate global nuclear threats. But if it were a task so easily done, perhaps the world would not have struggled for so long. In this regard, the Republic of the Marshall Islands supports those nations who are now able to affirm the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and we will continue to add our own voice in all fora, including the CTBT and NPT. We are committed to a close and inclusive examination of our own participation in the Nuclear Ban treaty, listening closely to our stakeholders and affected communities, and also taking into account any possible implications on our mutual security relationships. It will always remain our fervent hope that such weapons of mass destruction shall never again be tested or unleashed, and that all nuclear-armed nations will have the necessary political will to disarm.

Mr. President,

Earlier this year, my country experienced the tragic loss of our longtime Minister and climate change Ambassador Tony deBrum, and I wish to express my gratitude for those who have conveyed their condolences. Tony once said that for the Marshall Islands, “we are suffering the effects of climate change and of the nuclear legacy, and we have had nothing to do with either. In either case, people have to *choose* to end this world, this universe. You can either do it slowly with climate change, or you can press a button and blow it up, and neither is justified.”

Mr. President,

Just across from the United Nations, in the East River, there sits Belmont Island – a small, rocky little beacon only 1 meter tall. This island in New York must now be a reminder for the world's diplomats – that if you ever see it vanish in the rising sea – know that you have also lost the Marshall Islands, and the Pacific.

Mr. President,

Climate change is real – no credible scientist would be able to make a sound claim otherwise. But what we see with our own eyes in our low-lying islands reveals a real, present and growing threat to our own survival and security as a nation and member of the UN. We welcome the Paris Agreement's entry into force. This still stands as a truly lasting, ambitious, long-term agreement – and we must not allow our mutual confidence to be thrown off by any short-term bumps. We urge further ratification and full participation in the Montreal Protocol's Kigali Amendment – which was a legacy and the personal drive of the late Minister-in-Assistance to the President of the Marshall Islands, Mattlan Zackhras, who tragically and suddenly passed away last month. At the end of a long night of negotiations last year, the late Minister Zackhras said it would be a proud call home to his children the night the amendment was adopted. He said that because he knew the Kigali Amendment could mean the difference between if our country – and their future – would exist – or not.

Mr. President,

We strongly support the leadership our Pacific island neighbor Fiji as the incoming President of the UNFCCC's Conference of Parties, and under their trust and guidance all parties will adopt a strong rulebook. The Paris agreement is only as strong as the political confidence which stands behind it – and it is beyond imperative that, even in these early moments, committed nations are starting the challenging task of pushing ourselves to do even more.

Even with our limited resources, the Marshall Islands is committed not only to implementation, but to explore where our own action on energy can be strengthened – and if we can do it, so can everyone else. We must match our own ambition on emissions with stronger approaches, and close bilateral work, which better ensures that we are building infrastructure for a truly resilient future – to look beyond the distant multilateral resolutions, and know with evidence that we and our partners are giving our youngest and future generations every ounce of effort to leave with them a legacy worthy of their trust.

Mr. President,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands strongly agrees with the widespread call from the large and growing chorus of our fellow member states – that a more effective and efficient United Nations is beyond necessary. We support the Secretary-General to act, under his own authority, to continue to initiate practical but powerful efforts to reduce duplication, and improve delivery. These are not only about the use of public funds – including our own – but also about all of us improving our ability to achieve our full potential, and making clear progress towards the SDGs. We cannot do it alone, and we cannot do it with an international architecture which, however good the intentions, has too often lost the focus needed to help us make the connections between these powerful halls and our local communities.

Before we engage in an impossible fight over resources, we must first examine the use of the resources already at hand. Our small in-country joint presence office struggles with access to seasoned international staff to help us learn to navigate the system. Our UNDP Resident Coordinator for the Marshall Islands is actually a resident of another nation nearly - 3 thousand kilometers away. This resident coordinator, who is fully dedicated to her mission, is also tasked with being coordinator of 8 other remote island nations - where she also is not a resident. We must reexamine the management decisions which led to this outcome. Small island developing states will realize serious barriers to implementing the SDGs without a stronger focus from the UN system.

Mr. President,

This past June's UN Conference on Oceans and SDG 14 stands as a watershed moment of political will. But these good words too often fall short in global and regional decisions on oceans and fisheries. The Pacific small island developing states have sounded the alarm on the state of world oceans which all have heard – but not loud enough. We have the potential in the Pacific, as the Parties to the Nauru Agreement and beyond, to effect a step-change in the world tuna market – to dramatically change our own economic trajectory, and boost global food security along the way. The UN system itself must do far more to help us focus closely on this transformative opportunity.

And even if some of our partners are still slow to rise with us, the marketplace is already leading the way. And what the Pacific region is doing for tuna – to boost sustainable practices and ensure our own participation at the same time – we are also doing with wider oceans. Increasingly, our political partners will come to find that our political support will rest closely not upon their own pressure, but the extent of their political will to follow our lead on sustainable oceans and fisheries. And while it may be our own Pacific economic and environmental survival at stake, it is also a firm push to the rest of the world to ensure that two third's of our planet's surface is no longer in peril.

Mr. President,

If indeed no one is to be left behind in the SDGs, and to fulfill our UN Charter, than we should consider that the exclusion of Taiwan from the UN and it's related agencies has created a major challenges for both the government and people of Taiwan in their pursuit of their fundamental right to participate. As in my own nation, Taiwan is an indispensable partner for the international community, including on humanitarian aid, medical assistance, disease prevention, environmental protection, anti-terrorism and trackling transnational crime. Pragmatic approaches could allow us to work through controversy, and achieve global benefit through universal participation, including at ICAO, the UNFCCC and the WHO. UN resolution 2758 of 1971 has been misused to justify an exclusion which has not only literally denied access to the people of Taiwan from entering these doors, but steps over a powerful opportunity to work together with a proactive contributor to peace and the common global good. As the United Nations, I believe we all can and must do better.

Mr. President,

These may be trying times, and the challenges of the world are severe – but it is in such adversity that true character is defined – and if an effective United Nations was ever truly needed, it is now. We must look outward to embrace the community of nations, rather than look inward towards our own self-interest at the expense of everyone else. Multilateral engagement must be our guiding light as we move towards a more effective and efficient UN.

Thank you and kommel tata.