

**Statement by Minister Tony A. de Brum
Head of Delegation of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
High Level Segment of the 19th Conference of Parties
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

**Warsaw, Poland
November 21, 2013**

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands associates itself with the statement of Nauru, on behalf of the Alliance of Small Islands States. I also extend warm support for Fiji as the chair of the G77.

I want to begin by asking you to imagine a world far from this darkened, air conditioned room. I want to transport you to a very different world – *my world* – where climate change is a lived reality and a battle my people fight every day.

I come from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, a country made up of more than a thousand islands scattered over a million square kilometres of ocean, about four hours flight south-west of Hawaii. Our islands lie an average of just two meters above sea level, and we are one of only four coral atoll countries in the world. Mine is a country where the ocean is rising faster than anywhere else in the world, where the coral beneath our feet is being eaten away, and where the window of opportunity to secure our long-term survival feels like it is closing before our eyes.

More than twenty years ago, I first came to the United Nations to fight for my country's independence. This tiny black placard [holds up 'MARSHALL ISLANDS' sign] always reminds me of that fight. But the gathering climate storm risks committing this placard to the dustbin of history. Even after having endured the horror of some 67 different nuclear tests in the middle of last century, the threat posed by climate change now threatens to wipe us out entirely.

Mr. President,

This month we have seen a new breed of typhoon smash into the Philippines and Palau, leaving thousands of precious souls behind. On behalf of the Marshallese people, I want to express my deepest condolences to all those who were affected. Words cannot express the suffering they are now enduring.

Earlier this year, my Government was forced to declare a State of Disaster when an unprecedented and prolonged drought across our northern atolls left thousands of my people without enough food or water.

Just six weeks later, a king tide flooded our capital to the south, including our President's home and our airport. Two climate disasters in two months. As I said to the US emergency response team that came to assist: "Welcome to climate change!"

While we are on the difficult road to recovery, it will not be the last time, and I cannot help but feel gravely concerned of a complex and painful future beyond the reach of resilience and adaptation. I am not being fatalistic, but ambiguity on long-term risks can no longer be further ignored. What were once distant threats are quickly becoming our new reality. However valid our concerns, we are continually directed to the next door down the hall and, it seems, all the doors are closed. For this reason, we cannot proceed a step beyond Warsaw without a real and meaningful outcome on Loss & Damage.

Mr. President,

In spite of all this, we islanders are not waiting for the proverbial coconut to fall on our head. We may be small, but we are committed to leading the way. We have now completely solarised our outer island communities, and we are working on an Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion to use the power of the ocean that surrounds us to turn us into a "carbon negative" nation. And we are leading some of the most ambitious ecosystem-based adaptation efforts in the world, through our subregional Micronesia Challenge. Our message to the world is simple – if we can do it, so can you.

In this spirit, just two months ago in our capital Majuro, we hosted the biggest Pacific Islands Forum in history. The result was the Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership, a clarion call to action forged on the frontline.

Through the Declaration, every member of the Forum – including all of the Pacific Island nations, and Australia and New Zealand – committed to be ‘Climate Leaders’, and we called on others to join our cause. We have had strong messages of support from nearly every corner of the globe, and the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union have listed commitments to do more than what they were doing previously. The Declaration was also the first of its kind to call for action not only from national governments, but also from sub-regions, cities, the private sector and other organizations in recognition of the crucial role we must all play if we are going to overcome this enormous challenge. We are glad to have recently welcomed a commitment from the State of Hawai’i.

Mr. President,

During our discussions this week, we must remember that we all stand together on the precipice, and the world is watching.

After sailing this year through 400 parts per million of CO₂ in the atmosphere, we are approaching a tipping point that threatens to flip the world into a full blown climate emergency. As the poorest and most vulnerable increasingly endure the damage of a warming world, tired excuses are no longer acceptable. Waiting until 2015 or 2020 to upscale our ambition is irresponsible, and gambles with our future and that of the planet.

That is why in Warsaw – the capital of a nation known so well for ‘Solidarity’ – we must focus on what unites us all, and no longer on what divides us. I am personally appalled by the squabbling of officials at the apparent expense of what should be a common international response. I am truly saddened to think that this is the limit of our solidarity and our commitment to act together.

Mr President,

I for one have not given up hope. But we must change course now. We must show the world that climate action is not a choice, but essential to our well-being and firmly in our collective interest. Our coalition of ambition must grow, and fast.

As Ministers begin their work in Warsaw today, we have two major imperatives in mind.

First, to find ways to bend global emissions downwards before 2020. To do this, we need to speak the language of opportunity, leadership and the benefits that come with the transition to more sustainable and secure world abound with clean energy. To help find these opportunities, AOSIS is here championing an urgent and practical initiative to speed the uptake of energy efficiency and renewable energy worldwide through what we have called the “Warsaw Workplan”. I implore you to join the islands in this leadership. And if you cannot lead, then do not impede those who will.

Our second imperative is to define a roadmap to adopt a new legal agreement for all in 2015. The Durban Platform has given us one shot at this agreement and it must count. So we cannot continue to proceed towards Paris by only repeating, senselessly, all of our deeply entrenched positions. We all owe the world, we our own populations and future generations much more than a persistent deadlock. The clock is ticking, the temperature is rising, the oceans are swelling, and the body count is growing. As much as we need to signal that we will act tomorrow, action today is what will count most. It is now or never.

Mr. President,

Finally, the Republic of the Marshall Islands affirms its unequivocal position of support for Taiwan’s meaningful participation as an observer within the UNFCCC. Taiwan has not only put forward some of the most ambitious emissions goals in the Asia-Pacific region, but is also a close partner in assisting the Marshall Islands, and many other parties, with our own clean energy goals. Such important efforts deserve full and appropriate recognition.

Mr. President,

In closing, I am here with a full heart and an open mind. I will do whatever I can to make Warsaw a success. I can only ask my fellow Ministers that they commit themselves to join me in this endeavour. Then, and only then, will I allow myself to hope that this placard spells the name of a country that has managed to endure the challenge of our generation.

Kommol tata and thank you very much.