

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen,

I bring you the warm greetings of Yokwe from the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and I wish to thank you for your attendance at this important conference. I extend special thanks to Professor Michael Gerrard and Columbia University for their excellent arrangements and hard work in organizing this conference.

I also wish to thank our partners who have supported this conference, including the Republic of Korea's Global Green Growth Institute, the World Bank, and the government of Israel. And in particular I want to thank the government of Australia. The issues before us at this conference are, after all, also issues of a truly common Pacific concern.

Those here today might ask why the Republic of the Marshall Islands took the initiative one year ago to approach Columbia University. What were our specific interests, and what did we seek to achieve?

The answer is simple.

As one of the world's lowest-lying island nations – comprised of narrow atolls less than two meters above sea level – our very statehood is at risk. We know this not only because of what scientists tell us, but because we are seeing it every day with our own eyes. It is as though everything around us, our manit and culture, our communities, our traditions, our land - and in fact our very livelihoods - are now in jeopardy.

We can no longer afford only to draw your attention to our unique vulnerabilities. We must now work together to recognize and directly address these risks. There has been enough talk. Now – starting tonight –it is time for a reality check. It is time for action. It is time we took charge of our future.

Our government, and especially our local communities, have put forward our own immediate action – goals to sharply cut our own harmful emissions and to boost our energy security – and a policy, roadmap and proposals to adapt and try to avoid the worst impacts. And we need to do so much more – ourselves and with our partners – to turn words into visible reality.

As a leader, I can assure you that casual discussions on relocation are an irresponsible political exercise. But it is now not so distant – relocation is also undeniable threat knocking at our door, and something which could well unfold in decades to come. It is a threat that the international community is presently unprepared to address, and it can no longer be ignored.

In all eventualities, the sovereign state, the security and human rights, and the culture of the Marshallese must and will be protected. I am committed to no less, and I expect the same commitment from the Pacific, from AOSIS members, from all of the Marshall Islands' closest political partners, from the UN Secretary General, and from the

international community. Our Marshallese nationality is defined only by us - it comes from our hearts, and that will never change.

As an over-riding priority – I emphasize that urgent action must be taken not only in building bridges to move forward stalled climate negotiations, but in global energy investment choices. At present this is only a hope – and far from a certain reality.

We will hear tomorrow on how there is a critical connection between our adaptation efforts and our survival. This is more than a matter of just spurring immediate action, but we are also realizing that efforts now may have to also look not just ten or twenty years into the future – but perhaps fifty or one hundred years – to ensure our survival.

It is one of the world's most complicated planning tasks put upon a nation which has limited capacity.

But what if all the international efforts – including our own – miss the mark? And what can we do now to start address these long-term threats?

First is that the voices of those most affected need to show primary leadership on this issue. I am asking that this September, at the UN General Assembly, the Atoll island nations of the world hold a one-day ministerial meeting – the Forum of Atoll Nations – to discuss and address our common threats and challenges, as well as some of the important issues which have been raised here at this conference.

This conference has raised the notion of legal responsibility and harm – damage caused not by our action but by other nations. Where there is a wrong, there is a remedy – this is one of the most basic pillars of all legal systems. Perhaps there is a means to address this in international courts and tribunals, including through advisory opinions.

I must remind you that the Marshall Islands, and other Pacific nations, played an important role in the 1996 International Court of Justice opinion on the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

But there are also many and unprecedented hurdles with such legal action – how do we define global responsibility? Any such legal action should truly tell our own story, with our voices, and will be done for results and clarity, not for show. We do not need another solution in search of a problem.

Options do exist – in the Pacific, many nations have successfully used trust fund models to address our futures. I urge the international community to look at trust funds as a way to manage our long-term risks – trust funds can facilitate investment in renewable energy in developing nations, some of the interest can fund our adaptation efforts, and – if at an appropriate scale – they can be further considered if and as we cross critical thresholds, for example, losing our water security.

The issues which have been raised here are ultimately long-term threats to our security, and they have clear legal implications.

There is one primary forum where the international community considers and responds to threats to peace and security. That is the Security Council of the United Nations.

Under the leadership of Germany – and the support of Portugal – the Security Council has scheduled a meeting in July to address climate change and security impacts.

But this meeting must be more than a casual discussion lacking a concrete outcome. I am asking the largest nations – including the Permanent Five members – to put aside for a moment their differences and to actively and appropriately address our security issues.

I have also sought the support of the UN Secretary General for this initiative in our meeting last week.

When the President of a low-lying island nation is forced to confront these issues of sovereignty and political borders, of statehood, of defending the very shores of his nation, it should be self-evident and beyond question that climate change impacts pose a clear threat to international peace and security. The UN Secretary General's report on this issue is clear, and together with my Pacific small island colleagues, I expect the Security Council in July to recognize this connection with absolute clarity, and to ask the Secretary General how the UN system can best respond.

To spur further action, I have requested the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative, to assist the Council in addressing current and projected impacts, including by mapping such threats.

Finally, those who have gathered here tonight have important positions of influence – as Ambassadors and officials, as creative academic thinkers, as civil society representatives.

I would ask that you consider the initiatives I have put forward, and I would ask for your active support.

Thank you and kommol tata.