

Republic of the Marshall Islands

Statement by

H.E. The Hon. Phillip Muller
Minister of Foreign Affairs

in the General Debate
51st United Nations General Assembly.

As Written

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to take this opportunity on behalf of His Excellency President Amata Kabua, the Government and the People of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to thank and to acknowledge the leadership of the outgoing President, Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral, and also to congratulate you, Ambassador Razali Ismail, on your well-deserved election to this high office as the new General Assembly President. I am pleased to inform you, Mr. President, that at the recently concluded Forum meeting in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, your country, Malaysia has been invited to join the Post-Forum Dialogue next year as a Partner, where we hope to further our cooperation. In our capacity as Chair of the South Pacific Forum, I have the honor to first make some remarks of a regional nature on behalf of the Forum Members who are also United Nations members, followed by some remarks of a more national perspective. (The South Pacific Forum, established in 1971, now has the following membership: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.)

Mr. President,

The South Pacific Forum held its twenty-seventh meeting last month in Majuro, the capital of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The theme for this session, "Pacific Solidarity for the Common Good", highlights one of the important building blocks of our regional cooperation towards sustainable development. The Forum Leaders reviewed a broad range of measures in the area of economic reform and development. These and other important decisions of the South Pacific Forum Leaders are contained in the Forum Communiqué, which has been submitted to the Secretary General, and will be circulated as an official UN document.

In his opening remarks to the Majuro Forum, the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, H.E. President Amata Kabua emphasized the unity and harmony of the nations gathered at the meeting, which traversed immense ocean barriers. The restraining pull of national interests and cultural differences are all harmonized, fine tuned so to speak, into a single sea of unity. It is through this unity that seemingly insurmountable obstacles or intractable problems can be resolved. In deliberating and reviewing their respective performances together, and charting the way towards a prosperous and secure future for the region, the Forum Leaders gave deeper meaning to the theme of this year's session. I wish to make some remarks about the outcome of those discussions.

Environment and sustainable development,

Mr. President, climate change is a global problem that requires a global solution. The Forum has again highlighted its concern over climate change and call for urgent action in view of the Second Assessment Report of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), which states that the balance of scientific evidence suggests a discernible human influence on the global climate. This report has given us much to be concerned about, and the Forum Countries call on the international community to accelerate negotiations on the text of a legally binding protocol or another legal instrument in time for adoption at the next Conference of the Parties. The international community needs to achieve significant progress towards the goal of lower greenhouse gas emissions in the near future. The survival of many Small Island Developing States, as well as many other developing states who are adversely affected in some way by climate change depends upon our taking action. We will all be adversely affected by climate change. For this reason we reaffirm our full support for the AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States) protocol in the context of the discussions of the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate, which calls for stronger carbon dioxide reductions in a time-bound framework.

Law of the Sea

Mr. President, during this session of the General Assembly, we will review progress on a number of related issues under the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea, including fisheries conservation and management and efforts to reduce the incidence of illegal fishing practices. We will also reiterate the importance which our region has placed on the effectiveness of an international legal regime for oceans and its resources, including in our view, providing adequate financial resources to the International Seabed Authority in Kingston, Jamaica.

The Forum Leaders underscored the importance which the Pacific fish stocks have for international trade and our livelihood. We recognize that this important resource must be managed sustainably to maximize its benefits to our region. In this connection, the Forum Leaders have requested our regional experts (Forum Fisheries Agency) to develop comprehensive agreements for the sustainable management of the region's fisheries across the full geographical range of the stocks, including the high seas, taking into account the Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks opened for signature here in New York last year. The Republic of the Marshall Islands has offered to host a second High Level Multilateral Consultation on the Conservation and Management of Fisheries Resources of the Central Western Pacific next year to advance this process. This Ministerial meeting will discuss a number of issues, including restocking, greater involvement of the distant water fishing nations in conservation and management, data gathering on the range of the stocks, and transshipments.

Special session to review Agenda 21

Mr. President, the Forum Leaders are committed to the review and appraisal of Agenda 21, which will take place at the special session of the General Assembly next year. Mechanisms have been established for regional dialogue, partnership and participation in the development of concrete proposals for action, on the progress made since the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. The Forum has asked its Advisory Committee to coordinate these tasks, and make preparations to submit reports to that special session. In this regard I wish to call on our development partners to support the efforts of the Forum countries and our regional organizations, so that the special session will be a thorough and comprehensive review. But in this regard, we caution against a proliferation of organizations

comprehensive review. But in this regard, we caution against a proliferation of organizations and meetings, when the concerted efforts of the international community should be focused on practical measures which will improve on the efforts underway at the regional level. It is problematic for our administrations, with limited resources, to cover too many meetings dealing with the same topics, and we fear that unnecessary duplication may occur as a result.

We will report on a number of initiatives to that session, following on from the report submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1996 by SPREP. In our region we recognize the importance of the multiple role that forests have, and the need for a comprehensive approach by the international community to the sustainable management and conservation of all types of forests. For our part in sustainable forests management, the Forum endorsed a South Pacific Code of Conduct for Logging of Indigenous Forests in Selected South Pacific Countries. Also, in light of the fact that 1997 will be the Year of the Coral Reef in the Pacific, we hope to include progress reports on the implementation of coastal zone management strategies.

Mr. President, the international community took steps at the Barbados Conference to acknowledge the special situation and interests of Small Island Developing States. We stress the need to give particular attention to the comprehensive Programme of Action produced at that Conference, and to have the special needs of Small Island Developing States adequately addressed in the United Nations development efforts. The special session in its review of Agenda 21 should lay the grounds for further international cooperation, national and regional initiative and the mobilization of resources for meeting the sustainable development needs of Small Island Developing States.

Mr. President, I wish to raise some of issues of political significance for our region.

New Caledonia

The Forum commended progress by France and parties in New Caledonia in the implementation of the Matignon Accords. It welcomed the recent reception accorded to the Ministerial Mission from the Forum countries by the French and New Caledonian authorities. Forum Countries encourage all parties to continue dialogue in the search for a durable solution to the question of the territory's long term future.

Security Council elections

Mr. President, I wish to inform the General Assembly that the Forum has reaffirmed its strong and unanimous support for Australia's candidature for the Security Council in this year's election. Furthermore, in recognition of the importance of Japan as a constructive partner for the region, the Forum also expressed strong and unanimous support for the candidature of Japan at the same election.

Nuclear issues

Mr. President, the Forum expressed satisfaction at the permanent cessation of French nuclear testing in the South Pacific. This marked the end of all nuclear testing in a region which had been subjected to both atmospheric and underground testing for five decades. China's recent announcement of a moratorium on nuclear testing meant that all five nuclear weapon states were now observing testing moratoria, long urged by the Forum. Earlier this month the General Assembly took action to adopt and open for signature a comprehensive test ban treaty. This was an effort fully supported by the Forum, and the resolution was co-sponsored by all the UN members of the Forum. We are pleased with the passage of resolution 50/78, and urge all States to join with us in signing and ratifying the CTBT as soon as possible, to

and urge all States to join with us in signing and ratifying the CTBT as soon as possible, to facilitate the treaty's earliest implementation.

International Court of Justice opinion

Mr. President, we should recall the advisory opinion tendered by the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, which recognized that all members of the international community have an obligation, to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion, negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. The Forum Leaders urged all states concerned, particularly the nuclear weapon states, to continue meaningful negotiations with a view to early further significant reductions of nuclear stockpiles as a step towards the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons.

They also warmly welcomed the signature and ratification by Vanuatu of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, the signature of Tonga, and the signing of the Protocols to the Treaty by France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. As a result of these developments, all states within the Treaty area have now given their support to the Treaty, and all five nuclear weapons states have undertaken to respect its provisions. Since making that call, we welcome the ratification by France of the Protocols. The Forum also urged early ratification of the Protocols by the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Southern Hemisphere Nuclear Free Zone

The Forum Leaders were encouraged by the establishment since their last meeting of two nuclear weapon-free-zones - in South East Asia (Treaty of Bangkok) and Africa (Treaty of Pelindaba). Leaders noted with satisfaction that these developments represented progress with respect to the decisions accompanying the indefinite extension in 1995 of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In this context, Forum Leaders expressed support for an appropriate resolution at this session of the United Nations General Assembly whereby signatory states of the southern hemisphere nuclear weapons free zone treaties and other members of the international community could affirm their support for these zones and cooperate in the furtherance of the goals of these zones and of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

The Forum again reaffirmed the existence of a special responsibility toward those peoples of the former United Nations Trust Territories administered by the United States, the Marshall Islands, who had been adversely affected as a result of nuclear weapons tests conducted during the period of the Trusteeship. This responsibility included safe resettlement of displaced human populations and the restoration to economic productivity of affected areas.

Mr. President, the Forum wishes to again raise concerns over shipments of plutonium and radioactive wastes through our region. These shipments must be carried out in accordance with the strictest international safety and security standards. All contingencies must be fully addressed, and full consultation must be carried out with the countries of the regions through which the shipments will occur.

Mr. President, I now wish to make some comments on behalf of my National Delegation.

Nuclear testing

Mr. President, in regards to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, it is important that countries who were severely affected by nuclear testing play a role in the 51 member Executive Committee being envisaged under the CTBT framework, to oversee all aspects of

the implementation of the Treaty. I wish to reiterate the announcement that the Republic of the Marshall Islands stands ready to present its candidacy for that Committee, once established.

Mr. President, we are grateful to President Clinton and his Administration for their transparent policy of disclosure of previously classified information. We also wish to thank our friends and supporters in the US Congress for their assistance. We wish to see that our cooperation continues to improve, and that the process of disclosure is accelerated. All the information pertaining to the nuclear testing program should be provided to my Government, in order that we may fully comprehend the implications to our planning for the health and well-being of our citizens and our environment.

The Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands has recently learned that the damage caused by nuclear weapon test programs during the Trusteeship are far greater and more horrible than that originally disclosed. As a result of all sixty-seven nuclear weapon tests, the effect of radiation released is currently known to include more atolls and more groups of people than previously disclosed, as reported by the White House Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments. The health, environment, medical, social, economic consequences resulting from the effects of radiation released remains a major concern for the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. As a result, at our current level of knowledge the costs related to the effects of radiation make it very hard to properly treat and care for the people who have, and continue to show, radiation related illnesses. This also applies to programs related to the rehabilitation of contaminated islands and the safe resettlement of affected communities. We can not solve these problems on our own, and we feel obliged to appeal to the international community. Our concern continues to be that our situation has not been fully addressed and rectified up until now. We welcome the new willingness of the US authorities to constructively work with the Republic of the Marshall Islands to address the full range of outstanding nuclear issues which have so long affected our relationship, and the well-being of our people. We acknowledge the assistance which has been provided up to now, which includes efforts at clean-up and resettlement. But much more needs to be done.

Scale of assessments

Mr. President, we reiterate the call which was made to the High Level Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations to reduce the so-called floor rate in the scale of assessments. This is an issue of vital importance to all developing countries with small economies, in particular a large number of Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries. The situation has been firmly noted by the Committee on Contributions in its last report (A/50/843/Add.2), that "the current floor assessment rate of 0.01 per cent resulted in a serious departure from the principle of capacity to pay for a number of smaller Member States." The Committee recommended that "in future scales of assessments, all Member States whose share of adjusted national income is less than the current floor of 0.01 per cent should be assessed at their actual share of adjusted income, subject to a minimum assessment rate of 0.001 per cent."

We call on the Fifth Committee to take action on this matter as soon as possible, and the time for this has come at this session of the General Assembly. In our view this would have a beneficial effect for over 60 countries. Moreover, it would assist a number of countries from our region who are not members of the United Nations to make the commitment to become members. But most importantly, we would alter the current state of affairs which penalizes small developing countries by this levy of an assessment which is far greater than our

capacity to pay.

Security Council expansion

Mr. President, another area of reform which is of great concern to us is the expansion of the Security Council. The need for a more democratic process, and for allowing greater participation in the work of the Council is something which we have all reaffirmed during the 50th anniversary session. However, we have to make more progress in implementing our ideas in this regard. The Republic of the Marshall Islands has expressed an interest in the proposal put forward by Italy on previous occasions, and we reiterate our support for their constructive ideas. Furthermore, the need to restructure the United Nations, to eliminate duplication, outdated programs and wasteful expenditures of resources should now be our priority.

Mr. President, this will be a very important year for the United Nations in that we will take stock of many of our current activities, and we will lay the groundwork for many others. As Chair of the South Pacific Forum, the Republic of the Marshall Islands will spare no effort to ensure a successful conclusion to this year's agenda. The Republic of the Marshall Islands has been an active participant in this august Assembly in the five years that we have been a Member. We have come a long way since the Adoption of our Constitution in 1979. We pledge our cooperation to your leadership, and look forward to working closely with you and the Members of the General Assembly.

Thank you Mr. President.

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