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Address by President Peter Christian

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Mr. President,

As you assume the Presidency of this 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly, I wish to recognize this historic occasion for Pacific Islanders, and express my congratulations. I also thank President Mogens Lykketoft for his leadership during the 70th session.

Mr. President,

After ten years of service, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon deserves great praise for his effective leadership, championing many issues important to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), including the political momentum to address climate change, and his push to catalyze the initial capitalization of the Green Climate Fund. Sadly, funds generously contributed have been slow in flowing to the needy states, contributing to painful delays in implementation of mitigation and adaptation projects.

Mr. President,

The Federated States of Micronesia celebrates its 25th year of membership in this organization. At the time we joined, following the end of the cold war, there was a great sense of optimism that long-standing obstacles to world peace and progress had been relegated to the past. Today, while there has been progress toward the great goals of this body, it must be said that much remains to be done:

Reform of our United Nations, most importantly our Security Council, has remained on our agenda now, for a quarter of a century, with characters from an era that needs forgetting.

Twenty-five years ago, Mr. President, the Small Island Developing States cried out for action against human-induced climate change, stressing that we literally face extinction as nations and as oceanic cultures due to surging sea level rise and related consequences. I must concede, Mr. President, that our voices have not been entirely unheard. We stand today, at last, many nations united to confront this dark, glaring reality. However, even in the relatively short span of 25 years the relentless advance of climate change has outdistanced the pace of our effort to deal with it – so that today, while all countries must count themselves as vulnerable, the Small Island Developing States are dealing with an already clear and present danger - the result of adverse climate change impacts.

Mr. President,

Over the years of my country's membership in this union of hope, we have observed what I would refer to as "glacial" progress were it not for the fact that the glaciers themselves are now melting. Nevertheless, we, along with everyone in this hall, must remain committed to the great mandates we so boldly assigned ourselves:

- the eradication of poverty;
- the advancement of international peace and security;
- universal adherence to principles of human rights;
- protection of our oceans and their resources; and
- better stewardship of our entire planet.

The list goes on and it is familiar to all of us. We run it out each year at this General Debate and in conference halls around the world – Yet despite our proclamations and declarations, we seem to be pivoting not too far from home plate. Our peoples look to us for progress beyond repetitious words.

Mr. President,

While Pacific Islanders live within a zone that shouts of peace, it pains us that the global menace of terrorism continue to spread worldwide, and it seems we are helpless against this tide of fear and violence; a fear that affects millions of innocent civilians, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, To the point that they must suppress their human dignities - and knock on a stranger's door to seek shelter away from the turmoils of war. Will we answer?

As small island countries in the Pacific, and as members of this family of nations we plead with the United Nations Security Council to take greater action and respond to this global crisis, if not for the mothers and the fathers. Then, at least for the children whose innocence allow them to play between tents and glad at the sight of strange food in a bowl.

We would like to know what is happening with the cease-fire in Syria. What are the United States and Russia doing about it? What is Syria doing about it? We know you have the power to do more.

Mr. President,

As part of the Asia Pacific region, the FSM is concerned with the peace and long term stability of the region. Together with other Nations, the Federated States of Micronesia condemns the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's ongoing provocative actions and rhetoric. Unchecked, the Pacific Ocean, the same Ocean we speak of saving for all our sakes, may become a battle ground. One truly wonders why Beijing and Moscow seem unconcerned that a missile could stray their way. I ask them to please intercede on all our behalf.

On this note also, the people of Micronesia look forward to the day when nuclear weapons will become a thing of the past, only remembered with great disdain and lament.

Mr. President,

I've heard "fit for purpose" is a phrase used a lot at the United Nations. We continue to see the need for a reformed UN that is not only fit for purpose, but is dynamic, changing its "modus operandi" to keep in step with changing world circumstances, accepting new methods like Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's example of the iPhone revolution and the need to stay on pace with changes. The UN has to be enabled to focus on preventive diplomacy around the entire world and not be limited to dealing with hot spots.

I totally agree with that position. And yes, the UN must be a catalyst for peace – a peacekeeper, more than a peacemaker. The UN Security Council, entrusted with the responsibility for maintenance of international peace and security, must adapt to modern times and be reflective of contemporary geopolitical realities. But, the Security Council, as an arm of the United Nations, can be credible and effective only if properly empowered and adequately supported by Member nations. In this regard, the FSM reiterates its support for the G4 countries to be made permanent members of the Council.

Mr. President,

The PSIDS group has long advocated for climate and security to become a regular focus of the Security Council. The group also submitted a proposal to the World Humanitarian Summit calling for a Special Representative in the UN system to be dedicated to the issue of climate and security. Momentum appears to be on our side, and we hope the Secretary-General will appoint the Special Representative, adding to his legacy as a champion on climate change.

Mr. President,

The choice of a new UN Secretary-General should emerge from true involvement of the whole UN membership. This would help to ensure that the new head of the Organization has the political support from all Members and is responsive, responsible and effective for and on behalf of all, not just select elite nations.

Mr. President,

The work of the UN rests on three pillars: Peace and Security, Development, and Human Rights. This is the first year of implementation after the international community adopted a number of milestone agreements on Disaster Risk Reduction, Financing for Development, the 2030 Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

We have learned from the High Level Political Forum exercise held in July that integrating the SDGs into our national plans will be a daunting exercise, and a "one size fits all" approach will not work. The exercise to show the true picture of our national circumstances should not be a burden on Small Island Developing States.

In addition, the UN should consider the statistics for countries with populations of less than 100,000 to ensure an inclusive process so that more truly "no one is left behind". Many of the challenges before the UN can only be addressed through the collective work of its membership. Support and Partnership is recognized as essential to making the SDGs universal and transformative for lives on the ground. National ownership is critical.

Mr. President,

While we may be known as "PSIDS" here at the UN, another acronym that we like to use is BOS's, that is Big Ocean States. FSM alone has 607 islands spread across 3 million square kilometers of the Pacific. We are custodians of the some of the world's richest biodiversity and marine resources, and have pledged to conserve 30% of our near shore marine areas under the Micronesia Challenge; a regional effort to preserve the natural resources that are crucial to the survival of Pacific traditions, cultures and livelihoods.

Speaking of cultural preservation, I would also mention the recent designation of our ancient ruins of Nan Madol as a UNESCO World Heritage site, a feat of construction that truly match the wonders of the Egyptian Pyramids. Our conservation efforts directly benefit the FSM's sustainable use of its oceanic fisheries.

Mr. President,

This United Nations remains our last best hope to galvanize the political will and the necessary commitment for our global agenda on climate change. Here, from this podium and elsewhere, leaders from Small Island Developing States, like many others, have called upon those Member States of our organization, and especially those in position of world leadership to step up and take charge in raising the urgency of greater mitigation and finance ambition to implement agreements addressing climate change.

Current government commitments fall considerably short of even reaching the 2 degrees goal that we agreed to in Paris. The recent ratifications of the Paris Agreement by more than 30 countries, including virtually all Pacific island countries, lift our hopes and raise expectations that others will soon follow suit

Mr. President,

Last year in my remarks to this body, I described the FSM's longstanding efforts to achieve an amendment to the Montreal Protocol to phase down HFCs, and finally, thanking new supporters and noting that the proposals were finally bearing fruit. HFCs are the fastest growing greenhouse gases in the world. HFCs are also extremely potent, with warming impacts that are hundreds to thousands of times that of carbon dioxide per ton.

Phasing down HFCs will prevent warming emissions equivalent to almost 100 billion tons of carbon dioxide by 2050, and will help the world avoid up to half a degree Celsius of warming by 2100. Thanks to many countries who support the phase out proposal as manifest in the Montreal Protocol have given this crusade a new momentum.

Mr. President,

I welcome the progress in diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba. My country, too, has established diplomatic relations with Cuba, and even if we had not entered into this relations for sovereign recognition, we would still give our strong support to United Nations Resolution 70/120. We ask the United States to accelerate its consideration and process towards lifting the embargo imposed on Cuba.

Along the same lines, I applaud the peace accord reached among the people of Colombia. There may be skeptics as to the survivability of this truce in Colombia, but let us give peace a chance, by applauding the great effort and praying for its success. VIVA COLOMBIA!

Mr. President,

Every year, before coming to the General Assembly, the Pacific Islands Forum meets to review and recommend our positions on issues worthy of bringing before this Assembly. Earlier this month, Heads of States and Heads of Government convened for its annual 47th meeting in Micronesia. At this Meeting, French Polynesia and New Caledonia were seated as full members of the Forum, and in the same forum the Federated States of Micronesia became a member of the Smaller Islands States.

Climate change, Oceans, Health and Human Rights, and Partnership were prominent on our agenda. On climate change, the Forum reinforced its position that achieving the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global average temperature increase to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels is an existential matter for many Forum Members, and that it must be addressed with paramount urgency. The Forum also observed that the Paris Agreement must be brought into force before the end of 2016 or as soon as possible.

On Oceans, the Forum reaffirmed that the Pacific region's most important natural resource is the Ocean. Toward that end, the Forum Leaders endorsed the Pohnpei Oceans Statement: A Course to Sustainability. Through this Statement the Forum reaffirmed its recognition that the Ocean is the basis of livelihoods for Pacific peoples, and further noted the valuable opportunity presented by the UN Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14. The Statement further urges the timely and comprehensive conclusion to the Preparatory Committee process established to make substantive recommendations to the UNGA. These will be on the elements of a draft text of an international, legally binding instrument under the Law of the Sea Convention on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdictions.

On fisheries, the Forum called for action to end Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated fishing, and associated activities, including high seas bunkering, human trafficking, and illicit trade. The Forum further urged flag States to exercise more diligent efforts in carrying out their flag State responsibilities and control of their nationals.

To conclude, Mr. President, our faith in this organization rests not on the hope that its goals can be reached within a timeframe, whether it be twenty-five years or seventy-one years. Rather, it rests on our confidence that nothing is beyond the possibility of achievement among like-minded nations willing to unite in sustained effort. In that light, this, the greatest convocation ever devised by man, will continue to be the lighthouse of our ways and those of future generations.

I thank you.