



REPUBLIC OF NAURU

Statement

by the

Head of Delegation

*His Excellency the Honourable Marcus Stephen, M.P.
President of the Republic of Nauru*

at the

GENERAL DEBATE

of the

Sixty-third Session

of the

United Nations General Assembly

*Wednesday, 24 September 2008
New York*

Mr. President,

I offer you my congratulations on your assumption to the Presidency of the sixty-third session of the United Nations General Assembly. I can assure you that Nauru will lend its full cooperation to you as you lead our work during this time. Also, allow me to take this opportunity to commend your predecessor, His Excellency Srgjan Kerim, for his leadership of the sixty second session.

I wish to reaffirm Nauru's commitment and abiding faith in the ideals and objectives of the United Nations. We declare our support for the Organization's efforts to resolve the multiple humanitarian, peace and security, and developmental challenges confronting our world today.

Mr. President,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address this Assembly for the first time as the President of the Republic of Nauru.

I took the challenge of office fully cognizant of my responsibilities to the people of Nauru. Despite knowing that the road to our economic recovery would be slow and painful, I have committed my Administration to carry out its duties based on fundamental principles of democracy, good governance and sound socio-economic policies.

At the beginning of this decade, Nauru was at the brink of total economic collapse. Much has been achieved to improve our economy and to address the resulting social problems. This has been accomplished by implementing a range of fiscal, economic and governance reforms.

I am happy to say, that Nauru today has stabilized. We are now at the beginning of a rebuilding phase in our history. However I say so with a degree of caution and regard for the fragility of our situation.

In order to secure Nauru's recovery and to ensure rebuilding and development, we will need ongoing assistance from our Development Partners. We need coordinated assistance, targeted at our priorities and in line with our strategies, so that we may fulfill our promise for a better quality of life for my people.

Nauru appreciates the financial and material assistance from our Development Partners; in particular; Australia, Taiwan, Japan, New Zealand and the European Union. We appeal that such cooperation be continued in order to strengthen our nation building efforts.

Since assuming office, I have been determined that Nauru learns from, and not repeats the mistakes of the past.

As a consequence of mismanagement and corruption, past Administrations took Nauru from what was then a bright future, to the edge of collapse. In so doing, national reserves and assets were all lost and we have been left with an unmanageable burden of domestic and external debt.

Nauru will only ever be able to service a very small portion of this debt if we are to ensure ongoing recovery and sustained development. We therefore seek the understanding and consideration of

those countries and institutions to which we owe money to allow debt forgiveness or major write downs.

At the same time, we are implementing financial, legislative and constitutional measures to ensure that this never happens again.

Mr. President,

Our limited human resource capacity, relative to the enormity of the tasks yet to be accomplished, is a further impediment to our development goals.

Lifting the quality of education in our schools, trade and skills training, certification of existing skills and ongoing professional and job related development are therefore high priorities for my government.

Increasing our human resource capacity will not only serve to address the risk to sustaining our development, but will increase job opportunities for my people domestically and abroad.

With unemployment overall estimated above thirty percent, and worse amongst our youth, labour migration and the associated remittances must be seen as part of the range of measures to secure Nauru's recovery and future.

I appeal to all developed countries with major workforce requirements to open up their job opportunities, reduce barriers to trade in services and promote labour mobility. This can contribute far more to the development of small states than many other traditional forms of aid.

Moreover, such measures can be targeted to specific sectors and activities, for fixed time periods and with certain conditions. The New Zealand and Australian unskilled labour schemes for Pacific workers are two prime examples.

The United States military expansion in Guam provides another opportunity for significant development assistance to the Pacific. We call on the United States for preferential access to these opportunities. This will require special trade, labour and immigration conditions.

We need to build our human resource capacity to shift Nauru away from its historical reliance on government and public sector employment. Likewise, we must develop Nauru's private sector. We encourage foreign direct investment and we welcome assistance in developing diversity and new industries on Nauru. My Government is focused on creating the environment to encourage and facilitate the growth of our private sector.

Mr. President,

Nauru's recovery and future development is particularly vulnerable to external factors.

Pacific Small Island Developing States are greatly exposed to both the food and energy security crises. Dependence on imported foods, our remoteness, and rising fuel and transport costs, have made both food and energy security particularly critical issues for our Region.

This is especially true for Nauru. Consider our situation. Our island home is fringed by a narrow rim where my people live just a couple of meters above sea level. The mining of phosphate on Nauru has left large pinnacle rocks covering eighty percent of the island which prevent agriculture and contribute to desertification and drought.

Although we place a high priority on the production of nutritious traditional staples, arable land is just too scarce to achieve a sustainable level of food security.

The Secretary General stated in his address yesterday that at this time last year rice cost \$330 a ton and that today it is now \$730. Nauru is paying nearly double this. Our imported rice costs us \$1,340 a ton.

Rice and other staples are simply becoming unaffordable.

Without urgent attention to our Region, it is estimated that an additional five percent of our people will slip into poverty because of high food prices.

We need the world to increase food production. This requires investment in training and in implementing appropriate farming techniques together with efficient seed and fertilizer distribution.

We also need increased access to food. This includes reviewing trade policies on food aid.

Mr. President,

The energy crisis is another significant external factor that impacts on our recovery and the security of our future.

Nauru already cannot afford the cost of fuel required to provide for all its energy needs. As a consequence, my people suffer with scheduled power cuts of up to eight or more hours every single day. This impacts on a parent's ability to care and feed their children. Without power, houses have no running water adding to health and sanitation problems. Power shedding limits business development and impedes government services and productivity.

The energy crisis is further disproportionately impacting Nauru in terms of transport services. Sea, land and air. Passenger and freight. All are fast getting beyond the reach of affordability for my people, further isolating our island nation and hindering our sustainable development.

We need urgent assistance to both develop immediate alternate sources of energy and to access economically viable sources of fuel.

The current reliance on fossil fuels for energy has further particular significance for the Pacific Small Island Developing States. It has resulted in emissions that are causing sea level rise and climate change. This is not scientific theory. We are experiencing the effects right now.

As with the food crisis, Nauru and the Pacific are not contributors to the causes, but we are particularly vulnerable. We will pay the highest costs and are the first countries to feel the direct consequences.

Global warming is predicted conservatively to raise sea level by one meter in this century. This will flood our only habitable land. Our people will be literally trapped between the rising sea and an ancient, uninhabitable coral field.

Despite our many challenges, we are working hard to create a safe and sustainable haven from the rising sea. We must rehabilitate our mined phosphate lands and return them to a habitable, arable state.

The cost of rehabilitating eighty percent of our lands is well beyond our immediate means. Rehabilitation of the island is a high priority and as part of climate change adaptation, we call for sufficient funding mechanisms including support from the United Nations and financial and private sector institutions to help restore our nation and improve our resilience.

Mr. President,

To address climate change as a world society, we need to provide much of our energy needs through renewable energy sources, as well as by reducing emissions from fuels and using cleaner fuels.

But as critical as this is for my nation, it is clear to me that the emitting countries are yet to do all they can. We all share the same global climate. It is therefore vital that all countries give much greater impetus and investment in developing alternate energy sources and implementing real measures to address climate change.

The issue of climate change for Pacific Island nations is a threat to international peace and security. Paragraph one of the UN Charter stipulates that a primary purpose of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security.

The Security Council is charged with protecting human rights together with ensuring the integrity and security of States. It is the paramount international forum available to Pacific Island Countries to draw attention to the dangers that their islands and population face due to the adverse effect of climate change.

We do not expect the Security Council to become involved in the details of the UNFCCC discussions but we do expect the Security Council to keep the matter under continuous review so as to ensure that all countries contribute to solving the climate change problem and that their efforts match their resources and capacities. We also expect that the Security Council will review particularly sensitive issues such as implications to sovereignty and international legal rights from the loss of land, resources and displacement of people.

Mr. President,

Nauru has incorporated the MDGs in its own National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS).

The Pacific island countries including Nauru, are struggling in many areas of the MDGs as a consequence of the recent fuel and food crises and the effects of climate change.

We lament that the gap between promise and implementation continues to frustrate our achievement of the full range of internationally agreed development goals particularly relevant to Small Island Developing States. It is extremely distressing that these goals were determined by consensus of the international community yet developed countries have yet to contribute the 0.7% of GNI committed to assist developing countries meet their targets.

On the eve of the High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals, may I call on the United Nations once more to re-dedicate itself to putting development as one of the highest priorities of this Organization.

I would remind the United Nations of its commitment to open a total of eight new offices in the Pacific island countries. We hope that this Organization will not waiver in its commitment to support our national priorities in meeting the MDGs and provide us with the urgently needed international civil servant to help our pursuit of sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

Mr. President,

Sixty three years after the United Nations was founded on the noble ideals of establishing a peaceful, free, and tolerant global order, the world community still suffers from the scourges of war, poverty, oppression, and discrimination together with facing today's colossal global challenges that threaten our very existence.

If the United Nations is to remain devoted to the ideals upon which it was founded it is absolutely critical that it is reformed through the revitalization and empowerment of the General Assembly.

If the United Nations is to remain a defender of human rights and international peace, it is crucial that the Security Council be expanded to better reflect geo-political realities of the modern world. This would mean giving permanent seats to Japan, India, Germany and Brazil.

Mr. President,

If the United Nations prides itself in being one that is inclusive and a champion for everyone, it cannot continue to deny the fundamental rights of Taiwan's twenty three million people from participating in the specialized agencies of the United Nations. It is clear to all of us that cross-strait relations have been improving since May 2008, and leaders from both sides have openly shown a willingness to work together to create a positive atmosphere.

It is now time for the United Nations to find a solution to the exclusion of Taiwan. Only by allowing Taiwan to participate meaningfully in the UN specialized agencies can the principle of universality and democratization of the UN be fulfilled, and regional peace and prosperity ensured.

Mr. President,

It is very simple and straight forward - we have vowed to the People – now let's keep it!

May God bless the United Nations and may God bless the Republic of Nauru.

Thank you.