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Address by President David W. Panuelo

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Mr. President,
Secretary-General,
Excellencies,

Mr. President, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, I congratulate you on assuming your role in this esteemed body. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, thank you for your pivotal role in galvanizing the world to fight against climate change and the challenges of our global community.

I bring you warm greetings from the Federated States of Micronesia. I have the distinct honor and special pleasure to address this Assembly on behalf of the people of Micronesia. As a sovereign State, my country greatly values this opportunity to be able to reach out to every peace-loving country in the world represented today in this Assembly.

Mr. President,

We are at a critical crossroad. The challenges we are facing collectively as a global community are unprecedented. This Assembly, being the main deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ of the United Nations, must be innovative and be ready to adapt to emerging realities and issues confronting us. For Micronesia—and this may be shared by most members of this Assembly—further strengthening the role of the United Nations in international relations is imperative and indispensable.

The role of the United Nations in maintaining peace and stability throughout the world is, more than ever, very important, as the world is increasingly finding itself confronted with conflicts, wars, refugees fleeing, borders closing, and many States turning inwards, with the mistaken belief that global unity undermines national sovereignty.

Tragically, the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities are often at the mercy of those who could have made constructive and progressive changes.

Meanwhile, record-breaking heatwaves, wildfires, king tides, and bewildering natural disasters, have become prevalent in many parts of the world. Environmental crises, in particular, are of unprecedented scale and magnitude unknown in human history. Our world is becoming complex; our environment changing; and our challenges becoming more and more daunting.

Micronesia remains committed to extending what we seek from all countries, namely: peace, cooperation, friendship, and love in our common humanity. We are resolute that there is no greater strength than respect and empathy for other human beings. It is through this resolve that we are committed to global unity in the United Nations, and I appeal to you all that we need to show that we are united in our response to these challenges.

Mr. President,

As you know, twenty-two years have passed since the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol, and four years since the adoption of the Paris Agreement. These agreements have a strong appeal for us, the small island developing states (SIDS), as a matter of common sense and survival. Climate Change and its far-reaching effects and threats to the future of SIDS are, to us, unbearable. Those of us from low-lying atolls and coastal areas across the Pacific are living the reality of Climate Change. This reality has become our nightmare.

The chorus of appeals and pleas, in particular, by leaders from SIDS from this podium demonstrate the extent to which our peoples, at the front line of climate change, are alarmed by the adverse impacts of climate change on our planet and the fate of our present and future generations.

I believe that action speaks louder than words, and I have told my citizens that our actions today are critical to our country's prosperity tomorrow. In the same vein, our world's actions today are critical to our global prosperity tomorrow. Climate change is real, so we must all take the necessary actions to ensure our survival.

Mr. President,

Micronesia is addressing the existential threat of climate change, noting that it is impossible to solve climate change without protecting the Ocean, the largest carbon sink in the world. We have partnered with the Blue Prosperity Coalition (BPC) to create a comprehensive climate smart Marine Spatial Plan for our exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This partnership will further enhance national capacity to conserve marine resources and ecosystems, including by establishing marine protected areas (MPAs) in at least 30% of our EEZ. This MPA coverage will become one of the world's largest.

Micronesia is also committed to strengthening the monitoring and control of fishing activities through the Technology for Tuna Transparency (T3) Challenge, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy. This initiative implements electronic monitoring in tuna fisheries to reach the goal of 100% transparency and coverage by 2023.

A few years ago Micronesia enacted a national law, making it mandatory for all sectors in the National Government to mainstream Climate Change in all of their policies and action plans. This ongoing mainstreaming effort is the first for a Pacific Island Country and underscores our commitment to addressing Climate Change in all aspects. One of the consequences is that there has been extensive solarization in various public and economic sectors throughout Micronesia.

Additionally, it was Micronesia that championed the negotiation and adoption of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol to phase down the production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons. Scientists tell us that the successful implementation of the amendment can lead to the avoidance of up to half a degree Celsius of global warming, which is crucial in light of the recent findings in the IPCC Special Report of 1.5 degrees. The amendment entered into force in January of this year, and we encourage the international community to put into action this crucial component of the fight against climate change.

Moreover, a ban on most forms of plastics, reducing our carbon footprint, has been in place by virtue of State legislations, with a proposed national bill that aims on imposing a ban on imported plastics on a country-wide scale.

Furthermore, Micronesia is in the process of updating our NDC for submission next year.

These are only some of the initiatives that our country is engaged in to take actions today for our world's environmental prosperity tomorrow. We encourage our partners to join us in these efforts, including through the provision of necessary support.

Mr. President,

I urge that the United Nations system step up to address climate change as an integral part of its work, including and perhaps most importantly the United Nations Security Council. The Security Council must transcend its traditional mandates and address the security implications of climate change. Climate change is the single greatest security issue facing the World at present, and it affects each and every one of us.

The General Assembly recently adopted a resolution calling for greater support and cooperation with the Pacific Island Countries. I want to take that a step further. The United Nations was formed to prevent the onslaught of a possible World War Three or other manmade calamities. We are presently in a war against climate change. And it is a war that humanity can win if we first acknowledge this existential threat, and that the Security Council treat it as such because this is in fact a security threat.

We must be radical in combatting climate change. It may be very difficult for us to do, and painful to transition from one lifestyle to another. But, we owe it to our future generations across the globe, those who are protesting outside on our streets, the youth who joined the Secretary-General during the Climate Action Summit, and all people who depend on us to actually and legitimately SPEAK FOR THEM, to do what must be done.

Mr. President,

Recently, a U.S. Department of Defense Report stated that “the effects of a changing climate are a national security issue with potential impacts to Department of Defense missions, operational plans, and installations.”

The United States provides for the overall defense of the vast airspace and Ocean-space of the Freely Associated States, namely Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands. While collectively, the United States, Australia, and Japan, provide for the overall peace, safety, and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific Region, there is no greater security issue to our Blue Pacific Continent than climate change. This is an existential threat to our countries.

Nobody is immune to climate change, including even the most developed countries, for example the United States. To be able to adapt to or minimize the adverse effects of climate change, The United States has invested billions of dollars in coastal areas like Florida, California, New York, and Hawai'i to name a few. Large States are vulnerable, too.

I have faith in the citizens of the United States to keep pushing their Government to embrace renewable energy and become more sympathetic to the Blue Pacific Narrative. We encourage the United States and other leading developed countries to champion the fight against climate change. The United States and its citizens are our true friends and our closest ally in our enduring relationship.

The meeting of the Presidents of Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands with President Trump in May, and the visit from Secretary Pompeo to the FSM in August, demonstrates that our relationship is enduring, special, perpetual, and sincere. We look forward to beginning and completing the negotiations on the expiring provisions of our Compact of Free Association.

Mr. President,

While it is gratifying to see the United Nations embrace the value of universal membership to address global issues, the realities of the 21st century are not adequately addressed by the current setup of the Security Council. To make the Security Council better and respond effectively to the new challenges of a new era, we must work together to reform the Council. The time has come for the reform to move forward.

Mr. President,

As we gather here at the United Nations, it is truly regrettable that we are again witnessing the far reaching and apocalyptic effects of climate change, like what devastated our sister SIDS state of the Bahamas. It only lends credence to what SIDS have warned for years. It is clear that ambitious actions on the climate so urgently required by members of this Organization can save the most vulnerable among us. To the people and the Government of the Bahamas, my heart goes out to you during this time of national crisis, and I offer Micronesia's solidarity and condolences.

Mr. President,

I take this opportunity to express my personal appreciation to the Secretary-General for his visit to the Pacific this year. Secretary-General Guterres is only the second Secretary-General of the United Nations to visit the Pacific SIDS in the nearly 75-year history of the United Nations. His momentous visit puts a spotlight on the climate crisis, and the deepening threats to the Ocean.

I also commend Secretary-General Guterres for leading the Climate Action Summit to raise ambition and increase climate action—an issue front and center to all SIDS, and indeed the entire World. The climate disaster, crisis, emergency, threat—whatever you choose to call it—is not just a SIDS problem, or a European or American problem, but a problem of all humankind. Together we shall save ourselves, or together we shall all perish.

Mr. President,

Beyond the significant importance of close cooperation with our development partners, there are also complementary and significant steps we are engaging through South-South cooperation for the Sustainable Development Goals to be fully realized and implemented, including with regards to climate change and the Ocean.

Mr. President,

As a Big Ocean State, Micronesia commands a major part of the Pacific Ocean, and we have delineated our maritime zones according to the Law of the Sea Convention. It will be a travesty, however, if our maritime zones and our rights thereto are challenged or reduced because of sea-level rise, to which we are among the least of contributors. In this regard, we welcome the decision earlier this year by the International Law Commission to study the topic of sea-level rise. I urge the international community to develop State practice that respects the permanence of maritime baselines and zones irrespective of sea-level rise.

Mr. President,

Micronesia is actively participating in the negotiations for a BBNJ instrument. We look forward to concluding these negotiations in 2020 with a durable and practical agreement in place, that takes into account, among other things, the special circumstances of SIDS and relevant traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and prevents the disproportionate burden of conservation and management of resources from falling on SIDS. As a Big Ocean State, a key concern for my small island country is rightly focused on a healthy ocean. The conservation and sustainable use of our Ocean is a key driver to our country's sustainable economic development, prosperity, and stability.

In that connection, as responsible stewards of the Blue Pacific, our Pacific leaders welcomed and committed themselves “to eliminate marine litter and the urgency of implementing the Pacific Marine Litter Action Plan...” last year. This will make a real difference for our Ocean's sustainability.

Mr. President,

We are a BIG Ocean State. Our EEZ constitutes nearly three million square kilometers, or one-third the size of Australia! The Ocean provides Micronesia's wealth, be it in our fisheries or in our traditional culture of navigating by the stars.

As part of the Blue Pacific Continent, Micronesia is committed to the Pacific Island Forum Leaders' declaration to "ensuring the long-term sustainability and viability of the region's fisheries resources, recognizing its centrality to the well-being of communities and economies."

But the type of challenges for our Pacific region require international cooperation to address the stark realities, among others, of large-scale illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities that ravage healthy fish stocks and undermine our prosperity and economic development. IUU fishing blatantly disregards our national laws, United Nations' resolutions and the region's resolve to sustainably manage and conserve our marine resources. It poses a grave threat to regional security.

Mr. President,

Earlier this summer, the Secretary-General, in his report on the UN Development system reform expressed his support towards the Northern Pacific, recommending a dedicated multi-country office (MCO) to attend to the needs of the five Micronesian countries. Clearly, a new approach to meet the challenges of a vast region of the Pacific is of significant importance to us in our efforts to implement the SAMOA Pathway and the 2030 Agenda.

Decisions like these are of such importance to the greater Micronesian region, and I would like to emphasize here the important role that an on-the-ground MCO would play and my gratitude to our Secretary-General for the foresight of considering Micronesia as a region deserving of more focus.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

We need a United Nations that can meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, a United Nations dedicated to act with bold decisions to tackle the security threats of climate change, a United Nations dedicated to eradicate poverty and resolve armed conflicts, a United Nations dedicated to bring the poor out of poverty, and to bring sustainable development to all. In short—a United Nations that leaves no one behind.

And in the final analysis, the success of the United Nations rests upon the collective will of all 193 members of this Assembly.

I thank you, Mr. President.