



Permanent Mission of the Federated States of Micronesia to the UN

300 East 42 Street, Suite 1600
New York, N.Y. 10017

Telephone: (212) 697-8370

Facsimile: (212) 697-8295

e-mail: fsmun@fsmgov.org

<http://www.fsmgov.org/>

78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Informal meeting of the plenary on sea level rise amidst the climate crisis

Statement by H.E. Jeem S. Lippwe, Permanent Representative

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Mr. President,

At the outset, my delegation associates with the statements delivered on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, and on behalf of the Pacific SIDS.

My delegation welcomes a discussion on human-induced sea-level rise. Such sea-level rise poses significant challenges to the lives and livelihoods of my people and the broader Pacific region, as well as our overall peace and security, our small land masses, our populations, our economies and food security.

However, our discussion today must be careful about the terminology we use, in light of recent developments at the UN and in the Pacific region, among other multilateral spaces. Specifically, we must be careful about characterizing climate change-related sea-level rise as an existential threat, at least with respect to certain legal matters of importance to Micronesia and many other members of the international community. As Micronesia mentioned in our statement in the Sixth Committee last week, we do not agree that such sea-level rise poses an existential threat to the legal rights and entitlements that flow from the establishment and depositing with the United Nations Secretary-General of baselines and maritime zones in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as well as to the continuity of legal Statehood. Such sea-level rise does pose an existential threat in a *physical* sense, especially to the atolls and low-lying islands and their residents like those in Micronesia that are particularly vulnerable in an environmental and human sense to the adverse effects of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. However, this is separate from *legal* considerations and whether those are truly threatened by such sea-level rise. The international community appears to be coalescing on this view, based on recent discussions in the Sixth Committee and the work of the International Law Commission. We encourage all participants in this meeting and any outcome documents from this meeting to maintain this distinction between physical existential threats on the one hand and legal considerations on the other hand with respect to climate change-related sea-level rise.

Even as we dispel the notion of such sea-level rise posing an existential threat in a legal sense, we stress the physical and human threats posed by that sea-level rise as well as the need for the international community to address the root causes of such sea-level rise and provide for robust responses to such sea-level rise when it occurs. Micronesia has adopted a national framework for adaptation as well as climate-proofing measures in our Strategic Development Plan and our Infrastructure Plan, but we can only do so much, given our limited national capacity. The international community must come together now to take action on reversing climate change and prevent environment degradation, as well as to provide appropriate financial and similar assistance to vulnerable States like Micronesia, including through the launching of the Pacific Island Communities Climate Fund. We appeal to you to do your part. As I have stated in the past, no person is an island, and it remains truer now than ever.

I thank you.