



PALAU



PALAU MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

BY

THE HONORABLE JOHNSON TORIBIONG

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF PALAU

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OF THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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

I am speaking for the first time as a Head of State. However, in 1977, I appeared with my country's delegation before the Trusteeship Council seeking independence. In 1994, the Trusteeship ended and we took our place as a member of the United Nations. Our independence is testament to the success of the International Trusteeship System, for which we are grateful. The legacy of our experience is a Constitution which incorporates the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- freedom, democracy, equal protection, rule of law.

We thank the Permanent Members of the Security Council who recognized our sovereignty: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the French Republic, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China and the United States of America -- which was our administering authority and to which we express our deep appreciation for having become our close partner under the Compact of Free Association, a relationship which we hope will endure.

As a new and young member, Palau has shouldered its responsibilities to the community of nations -- including deploying Peacekeepers to Darfur, Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands. As we sign international conventions and meet our counter terrorism obligations -- as set forth by the Security Council -- we remember and honor the legacy of the United Nations.

While our political progress has been satisfying since independence, I must report to you that we are now confronted with several looming threats to our continued peaceful way of life, and indeed to our very existence. Climate change, environmental degradation and the world financial crisis are challenges we will need to work with the international community to overcome.

Mr. President,

We associate ourselves with the statements of concern we heard in this room earlier this week on climate change. We applaud the commitments made and note that we must use our best efforts to stop this slow moving tsunami which threatens to engulf us. To this end, Palau, and our neighbors in the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, have adopted a joint policy, known as Green Energy Micronesia (GEM) to move to renewable energy as a pillar of our collective energy security. Furthermore, Palau has signed the statute of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and we look forward to the exciting work which will emanate from the United Arab Emirates. We are hopeful that the combined efforts of all our nations will lead to a fruitful outcome in Copenhagen.

We note in particular the statement of the new Prime Minister of Japan, H.E. Dr. Yukio Hatoyama. Japan's vision and commitment to save our planet are inspiring. This is one of the many reasons we support Japan for a permanent seat in the Security Council.

We reiterate that climate change is indeed a crosscutting issue, for which we need to examine all aspects, especially the security impact of climate change. This is why Palau and the Pacific Small Island Developing States initiated resolution 63/281, "Climate Change and its possible Security Implications." We look forward to the Security Council's meaningful action on the resolution.

Mr. President,

Palauans have lived throughout history in symbiosis with the sea. We are seeing now though that the sea, which has long been the source of our sustenance, is both rising in rage to destroy us and becoming barren. This fury was caused by the abuses of humankind and we therefore need to take every action necessary to allow the oceans to heal themselves.

In days gone by, the traditional chiefs of Palau would declare a "*bul*" – a moratorium to protect a resource which had become scarce. This traditional concept, now popularly known as conservation, shows the way for us to move forward. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed." This is why the world must declare a *bul* on destructive fishing practices like deep sea bottom trawling, unsustainable harvesting of shark for their fins and overexploitation of tuna stocks.

Mr. President,

The odious fishing practice of bottom trawling, where a weighted net is dragged along the sea floor crushing nearly everything in its path, is contributing to the rapid loss of a critical ecosystem, our coral reefs. We have outlawed deep sea bottom trawling in Palau, but no matter what we do in our own waters, there must be an international solution.

For several years, we have advocated, along with our Pacific neighbors, a moratorium on this practice. The Sustainable Fisheries resolution adopted by the UN in 2007, urged nations and regional fisheries management organizations to stop trawling in sensitive areas by 2009. We have waited for compliance, which has not come, and now renew our call for a worldwide moratorium on this practice.

Mr. President,

An equally destructive fishing practice is shark-finning. We have banned it in Palau and call upon the world to address this issue in order to save the sharks from extinction.

The strength and beauty of sharks are a natural barometer for the health of our oceans. Therefore, I declare today that Palau will become the world's first national shark sanctuary, ending all commercial shark fishing in our waters and giving a sanctuary for sharks to live and reproduce unmolested in our 237,000 square miles of ocean.

We call upon all nations to join us.

Mr. President,

It is anomalous that Palau is experiencing economic difficulty while it sits in the middle of the richest waters in the world. We can no longer stand by while foreign vessels illicitly come to our waters to take our greatest resource, our tuna stocks, without regard to their conservation and without regard for adequate compensation to the island states which rely on this resource.

Palau believes that the best model for a regional effort to conserve our tuna resources and maximize the benefits to us is the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). I therefore will work for the establishment of OTEC, the Organization of Tuna Exporting Countries, and I now call upon our friends in OPEC to come forward and help us to understand and obtain fair value from our threatened resource and to make tuna fishing sustainable.

Mr. President,

I come now to the economic crisis which my country is facing. As a developing nation, we are grateful for the grants provided by our allies and partners to advance our development. They have been helpful. But, we must acknowledge that outright grants do not always create meaningful employment. Jobs created are illusory and temporary.

Without a strong local economy, our children, our most valuable resource, are leaving our shores for opportunities elsewhere. As they leave it creates a continuing downward cycle which we must stop.

Our allies and partners can help us stop this cycle by promoting the development of private enterprise in our country. We need capital, and entrepreneurial expertise. I implore our allies and partners to consider providing incentives to their nationals to encourage them to come to our islands and launch partnerships with our talented people to create a viable economy. Let us once and for all put aside the fiction that we need handouts. What we need are partners to help advance our economy and put an end to the outmigration of our people.

Mr. President,

We note with satisfaction the decision by the People's Republic of China to invite Taiwan to attend the World Health Assembly. The health and safety of the world's people is at the heart of the ideals of the UN. In order to further promote these, we recommend that Taiwan be invited to participate meaningfully in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other international organizations.

Mr. President,

We have heard the voices of world leaders from countries small and large, powerful and vulnerable. We have heard the voice of science. Let us heed these voices, fulfill our obligations to our people, and work for a strong economy and a healthy planet.

Thank you.