

*Republic of the  
Marshall Islands*



*Permanent Mission  
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**STATEMENT BY H.E. THE HON. TOM D. KIJINER,**  
**MINISTER OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT,**  
**REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS**  
**TO THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE**  
**FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS**  
**FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

Berlin, April 6, 1995

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Thank you Madam President,

At the outset please allow me to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. I would also like to associate my delegation with the statements made by the Chairmen of the Group of 77 and China, and of the Alliance of Small Island States.

I will be brief in the interest of time, and the paper that is being handed out will contain my full statement.

Madam President, I stand before you representing the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Like several other small island nations, the Marshall Islands consists entirely of low lying coral atolls. It is a country of serene beauty, with pristine sandy beaches extending as far as the eye can see, and with coral reefs that are the habitat of a biological diversity comparable only to the tropical rain forests. For my delegation the cardinal issue before this Conference is the very survival of my country, as it may cease to exist.

We have heard a number of fine statements in this hall, and that is all very well. But the time has come to act. This Framework Convention has been acknowledged by most delegations as having inadequate commitments. All but a few countries are opposing moves to make this Convention a more practical and action-oriented program.

*Because of the importance that we place on this Convention, we were one of the first countries to complete ratification. I would like to reaffirm the statement made by my President, His Excellency Amata Kabua, at the Rio Conference in 1992:*

*"In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall widely be applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats or serious or irreversible damage, lack of scientific certainty shall not*

*be used as a reason for post-poning cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation. (Principle 15)"*

*I entreat the nations assembled here in Berlin to rededicate themselves to this precautionary approach with the same fervor that led us to adopt the Convention on Climate Change three years ago.*

*Indeed there has been rhetorical recognition of the special concerns of small island states at Rio, Barbados, Yokohama and on many other occasions. But real commitments have so far not been forthcoming.*

*But Madam President, in preparing the text of our statement, we became impressed with the coincidence of thinking between ours and that contained in the recent speech by the US Vice-President at George Washington University on March 17, 1995. In particular, his comment that "We must do a better job of ensuring that nations are matching rhetoric with reality, that we are accountable for what we say we will do..... Good intentions and high-flying rhetoric will not come close to helping us meet the very significant challenges inherent in reducing emissions."*

*We in the Marshall Islands have no reason to doubt the sincerity with which these words were spoken,*

*Our plea to the developed countries is also clear, sincere and straightforward: - admit that you are overwhelmingly responsible for global warming and that you must take steps to rectify this situation.*

However, Madam President, I wish to state for the record the strong resentment that my Government feels towards those countries who have been working so hard to undermine this process. These countries are acting out of selfish economic interests and short term profit margins, and appear to have no qualms about seeing the destruction of my country and other small island countries. They have been relentless in finding new ways to disrupt this Convention, and the Protocol negotiations have not even begun. What is worse, some of the rich developed countries are tacitly abetting this, in the belief that a split among the developing countries will be of benefit to themselves. We should not look at the problem of global warming as a North-South problem. It will affect us all.

*Some developed countries seem to think that they can shift responsibility for reducing the GHGs emissions to developing countries to cut their own emissions. Well Madam President, the GHGs emissions of the AOSIS countries are so low that they do not even figure on the tables used by the IPCC. But even as our emissions may rise it is an established principle of the Convention that in order for developing countries to incorporate emissions limitations in our development programs, we must be assisted by Annex 1 Parties in acquiring appropriate technologies now beyond our reached. This concept is central to the AOSIS protocol.*

*On a regional level, Heads of Governments met at the South Pacific Forum Meeting in Brisbane, Australia last year. They endorsed the communiqué and I quote:*

*The Forum recognized that existing commitments in the Framework Convention on Climate Change will not meet the ultimate objective of the Convention, and called for an early agreement on a process for negotiating one or more protocols to implement and elaborate the convention so that reductions of Greenhouse gas emissions are achieved.*

Madam President, my delegation has been raising the issue of global warming and the dangers that it poses to island states on numerous occasions before. How long do we have to repeat ourselves before the international community will do something about the problem of sea level rise. We have described our situation as a low-lying island state many times. We have committed ourselves to a development path that other countries only pay lip-service to. In the Marshall Islands sustainable development has been given a Cabinet approval. For us the concept is not merely an empty phrase.

But Madam President, even now that the Marshall Islands has made these commitments, that we have pledged to follow the recommendations of the international community, we are still experiencing a lack of international assistance to help us. There is so much that will have to be done in my country if we are to try to adapt to the changing climate. We can not do this on our own. Most donor countries probably consider us too small to invest development assistance funds in. While we do not accept that attitude, we have to live with it. The least that we expect is that the developed countries help us to survive.

We are worried, Madam President, by what we are experiencing in the Marshall Islands. The older generation tells us that certain parts of the reefs were above water when they were young. Every year the storms are getting worse, both more intense and destructive. Sea water contaminates many of our precious fresh water lenses. We did not create these problems, but we are the first to feel their detrimental effects. It is time to take responsibility for past actions, and to give remedy to the victims. The time for polite requests is over - this time we are demanding that those who are responsible for this global warming make amends.

Madam President, I wish to pay a special tribute to all the countries that rallied behind the AOSIS Protocol and worked to ensure that negotiations begin. In particular I draw strength from the cohesion and solidarity that is shown by my brothers and sisters from the aquatic continents. The Marshall Islands is also extremely grateful to all the Non-governmental organizations who have strongly supported AOSIS. You provide an example to your governments, by putting forward a moral imperative.

I would like to appeal to the moral conscience of the world leaders, to take a close look at what you can do to save not only my country, but other small island developing states from extinction. You have to reduce your greenhouse gas emissions, and you must start right now. The industrialized countries are responsible for this situation we are in today, and the people of

the Marshall Islands demand that justice be done. The United Nations has protected the physical integrity of some countries against foreign aggression. I hope that the organization can do the same for us in the face of this rising sea. I live on a beautiful island. I wish to continue to live there, and for my grandchildren to have a future there.

*Madam President, ladies and gentlemen: since time immemorial, the Great Ocean has been central to the lives of the Pacific Island peoples. It has been the source of our nourishment and income, and our culture and traditions have developed within the fragile ecology of the island and the coral atoll. Our people derive their livelihood from ocean-based activities, and our waters abound with fish that are caught commercially. Clearly, the fate of our nation is tied to the ocean. But today our way of life is threatened by the rising ocean. We did not cause this phenomenon, and we can not reverse it by ourselves.*

*Madam President, despite the arduous negotiations here in Berlin, we will remain strong and committed to the task ahead. We will actively participate in any meaningful process towards strengthening the commitments of the Annex 1 Parties within the United Nations FCCC. In the words of the distinguished Vice President whom we quoted earlier: "We can not forget that we are now witnessing the most extreme and concerted assault on the environment in history." Thus, rather than attack environmental initiatives, we invite you all to "work with us to craft policies that are as environmentally sound as they are economically beneficial".*

Without greater resolve by the peoples of the Earth, the Marshall Islands will be lost as an identifiable entity. We are powerless, and in the hands of others. We have survived many years of colonial domination, the costly battles of the Second World War, and the devastation of a nuclear testing program. But now a threat has come to the beauty of our natural surroundings, and to the Marshallese way of life. Therefore, in conclusion Madam President, this assembly should take note that whatever happens to the small island states will eventually happen to the bigger countries also. If you do not act now to stop this growing tide, it will be your undoing. We must all take responsibility for our actions. I thank you for your kind attention.

Kommol tata ("Thank you" in Marshallese)