

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS



**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. JURELANG ZEDKAIA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK
CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE
CONFERENCE OF PARTIES (COP/CMP) COPENHAGEN 16 DECEMBER 2009**

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Mr. President, Excellencies,

Iokwe. I bring you warm greetings from the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and I wish to associate this statement with that delivered by Prime Minister Tillman Thomas of Grenada on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States.

Leaders of the world have gathered here in unprecedented numbers. It is now a scientific fact that we cannot afford to wait any longer. We are all driven by the strong feeling - a fear - that a disaster is on our doorstep.

The extreme vulnerability of the Marshall Islands is no secret – my country lies an average of just two meters above sea level. We cannot retreat, for we have no higher ground. This is no longer a choice between fast-start action and long-term commitments. We need it all, and on a far greater scale and with a greater urgency than ever before. The window for safely reversing the atmospheric build up of greenhouse gases has all but closed. Global emissions must peak by 2015.

We cannot adapt to climate impacts when necessary support remains too often out of our reach. But all the money in the world will do little good in a 2-degree world. Anything above 1.5 degrees of warming threatens our very survival. There is no price tag on our statehood.

Mr. President,

Our islands and our land are our heritage, our tradition, and our culture. We will do everything in our power to protect that. We have resolved to build our resilience, and to reduce our dependence on fossil fuel imports, despite the fact that we already contribute almost nothing to global emissions.

We have specific initiatives to protect our core infrastructure, and our vulnerable coastal resources. Under the Micronesia Challenge, we aim to conserve at least 30% of our coastal resources and 20% of our agroforestry resources, among the places most vulnerable to climate impacts.

And the Marshall Islands will launch - together with our Pacific neighbors Palau and Micronesia - the Green Energy Micronesia strategy - under which the Marshall Islands is committed to reduce our emissions by 40 percent by 2020. A core pillar of the Green Energy Micronesia plan is to harness our renewable resources - our sun, our wind and our oceans - to provide sustainable and achievable energy security.

Even with ambitious action by all nations to reduce their emissions, we need far greater delivery on concrete adaptation, to safeguard our people and resources. We are among the most vulnerable, and we are already acting - the international community must ensure direct and prioritized access to new and additional finance. Not in 2012, but starting now. We do not need more paperwork or endless cycles of distant studies. We need progress to be visible in our local communities.

Mr. President,

For 20 years, Marshallese leaders have repeated the strong message that our survival is not negotiable. It has now come to the point that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees envisages that the Marshall Islands as being stateless by mid-Century. This is an issue of our security, our fundamental freedoms and human rights, and our sovereignty. For those at the frontline of climate impacts, it is painful to accept that the world's biggest polluters would respond with such weak words and empty ambitions.

The only way to arrive at a true agreement, a consensus for a new, low-carbon world, is to provide a strong legal instrument for confidence-building, finance delivery and technology-sharing. Such a treaty would capture what must be a new global consensus.

We have proposed, together with our friends in the Alliance of Small Island States, this consensus must be enshrined in legally binding framework that builds on our existing structures by extending Kyoto Protocol, and takes them to the next level with a second treaty which enshrines firm action by all nations. A political assurance is no substitute for legal affirmation.

It is alarming to the world that we have not yet arrived at a new, legally binding climate treaty, and perhaps we risk not knowing exactly when and how our negotiators will deliver such an agreement. It is not time that has been lacking. We saw in recent months such an unfortunate lowering of ambitions that, by the views of some, a non-binding political agreement could replace a legal treaty. Now time is short, but we must not lose sight of our goals. Mr President, the Marshall Islands is firmly focused on advancing a real and legally binding delivery treaty on action which addresses the most vulnerable nations.

Mr. President,

Our sovereignty cannot be coldly traded away behind the closed doors of the negotiation rooms. Distant promises are no longer enough; expressions of sympathy are unmatched by commitment. My people, and the world, deserve more. Our agreement, our consensus, must make the livelihoods of the most vulnerable the benchmark for measuring our success. The agreement, in its words and its numbers, must explicitly guarantee our right to survival, consistent with international law.

In light of the scientific consensus and observable impacts, I call upon the UN General Assembly to urgently refer the question of our survival and security to the International Court of Justice. Member states are at risk of failing to achieve the ultimate objective of the UNFCCC, and we must pursue this to safeguard, now and into the future, our fundamental rights of sovereignty, and ensure the protection of our resources, including those in our vast ocean jurisdiction. We can no longer wait to understand what will become of our people as the seas rise, as our corals die, as our islands become uninhabitable.

Mr. President,

My ancestors once lost our sovereignty to the forces of colonialism. Today, the issue before us is not just about sovereignty, rather, it is much more than that; it is about our fundamental right to simply exist as a people and as a nation. All I ask of you in this room is that you allow this generation of Marshallese, and generations to come, to survive as people in a country that is but a collection of tiny specks of corals in the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean. These tiny specks of coral islands may be considered as navigational hazards to most people, but for me, they are the lands of my ancestors. Allow these tiny specks to sink beneath the waves, and you will have destroyed an entire race.

Mr. President,

I will never be a silent witness to such international crime.

Thank you and may this season of peace be with all of you.