

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

STATEMENT BY HON. SENATOR ISAAC FIGIR

HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE
FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

At the Ministerial Segment

of

The First Conference of the Parties

to the

UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Berlin, 6 April 1995

**STATEMENT BY SENATOR ISAAC FIGIR, HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE
FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA AT THE MINISTERIAL SEGMENT OF THE
FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

Berlin, 6 April 1995

Madame President:

I wish to begin by expressing warm thanks and congratulations to you, to Berlin and to the Government and people of the Federal Republic of Germany for meeting so well the many challenges of hosting this Conference. From the very beginning of the negotiations on climate change, Germany has been in the forefront of the industrialized nations who have pushed this process, so it is fitting that the First Conference of the Parties takes place on German soil.

The Federated States of Micronesia is a nation of small islands occupying a large area of the Western Pacific Ocean. Our participation in the negotiations toward this Framework Convention has been long and consistent, driven by a strong sense of urgency, for we are among the countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

Simply put, the sea, our provider and friend, now threatens to become the instrument of our destruction. Our culture has existed for centuries in a delicate balance with nature which has been maintained through adaptation to the natural cycles of geographic and climatic evolutionary processes. Those processes, now no longer entirely natural due to the intervention of human activities elsewhere on the planet, are becoming skewed in such ways that if they continue, we will be ravaged by increasingly powerful storms and eventually inundated. It is a sad story that I need not further elaborate, thanks to the effectiveness of previous efforts in this forum by island countries working together, and by so many others who see the implications of our situation for the World as a whole.

Throughout these past two weeks, our delegation has felt great anxiety while nations with widely different situations and points of view confronted the fundamental question of whether they have the collective will to take effective action against climate

change. It appears that the outcomes now anticipated can give us only small hope, and while I would not lightly dismiss all the hard work that has gone on here, I'm afraid my report on returning to my country will be as simple as it will be disappointing: "The parties took two weeks to recognize that the commitments of Annex 1 parties are inadequate, but could agree on little more than to give the problem further study."

The additional framework that is being developed here is very tentative. Even though there are words which imply action, the danger remains very strong that not enough will be done after this Conference to bring the struggle against climate change to a level of effectiveness. Thus, I regret to say that I am in the position of making certain observations now, at the end of the Conference, which I would have thought more appropriate at its commencement.

There are two basic sides of the climate change question as it relates to the most threatened and the most helpless peoples. Those sides are moral and economic. What has concerned my country increasingly as the climate change debate has proceeded is the overwhelming prevalence of economic considerations in the debate - especially economic considerations relating to the industrialized North. Economic considerations are, of course, the bottom line of discussions on how to go about dealing with climate change, but what we are seeing all too often is economics driving a continuing debate over whether to attempt to deal with it.

True, it is inevitable that economics must play a large role in shaping the debate, but I respectfully suggest to this Conference that economics should not drive it. When the industrialized nations ask themselves from the perspective of the lifestyles they have established, "Can we really afford to act decisively against climate change," we all know that the economic aspects of the answer are significantly difficult, but we also know that the real answer is "yes." When that plain yes answer comes out as "maybe," or "not yet," it becomes clear that politics and the economics of the present have overwhelmed the important moral side of the issue.

What is so important about the moral side of this issue? So what, if the now-industrialized world has visited this problem upon the entire planet? You are only dealing with fifteen-million or so rather vocal and inconvenient people from small-island countries, and a much larger number of very poor, relatively unempowered peoples from desertified countries and low-lying coastal areas. All of us together have great difficulty in speaking to the North about sacrifices in lifestyle because the gap between us and you is so great. It is easy enough for you, then, just to implement weak, half-hearted measures and go on holding the line against any serious inroads on the accustomed luxuries of your people.

This is one case, however, where the easy approach comes into conflict with a strong moral imperative. I am not saying that the North's guilt is so heavy that any price must be paid to make things right for the victims of this process. The real moral imperative here is far more broad. It extends not only to poor, vulnerable people in the frontlines of exposure to climate change.

It reaches to future generations of peoples in the industrialized world as well, and this is the truly compelling dimension of the climate change issue for the developed world of today.

Yes, we do feel it is wrong for countries to continue their polluting practices in order to cling to luxurious standards of living, even though it inflicts ultimate destruction on poor, helpless peoples. But if that were the end of it I have to face the likelihood that we would be hard-pressed to alter that equation. It is not, however, the end of it.

We in the FSM have joined with other small-island countries since the inception of negotiations on this Convention, to stress our frontline exposure and the consequent threat posed to our very civilizations. Further, we have said that our situation provides a clear preview of what is in store for future generations of the entire planet if those who have the capacity to take effective action permit their responses to be delayed and watered down by present politico-economic considerations.

Thus, the industrialized world faces the necessity to deal not just with the question of the islands, which may be easy enough to sweep under the rug, but also with a far broader

question which can also be ignored, but will not go away - its debt to posterity - to our children and grandchildren, and the planet with which we are entrusted. Recently, at a meeting in a European capital, we saw a bright and determined university student confront her government policymakers to demand more forceful action, saying, "What you have caused is not your problem - it is our problem." Tragically, Madame President, if we today fail to take necessary actions that student and her children will surely inherit the problem, but by then they will not possess the means to reverse its implacable course. I can think of few other living examples that give deeper meaning to the term, "moral imperative."

The Federated States of Micronesia fully recognizes the efforts underway in most industrialized countries to address climate change, and we admire the dedication of so many individuals whom we know to be likeminded with us. But, Madame President, it is now time that government policies move beyond addressing, to grappling, with firm determination. I must confess that so far at this Conference the industrialized countries have exhibited great ingenuity at addressing, but even greater hesitation at grappling.

The AOSIS Protocol, for example, has received so many fine compliments that it might have appeared to be moving toward adoption. But amidst all the kind words, we have seen at the end of the day far too little willingness actually to seize upon the principles, and little or no concrete acknowledgment of the urgent need for action. This simply must not go on. There must be genuine and substantial commitments made, if not here, then somewhere else, and soon. If this Conference fails to make as much progress as many have hoped it is disappointing to be sure, but that must not lessen our resolve to move forward making the best use of the tools available to us.

Suddenly, COP 2 seems not so far away. There **is** much to be done in the coming year to give the process of this Convention the momentum it requires. The AOSIS Protocol remains before you, and the urgency for its adoption grows stronger each day. The Federated States of Micronesia appeals to the industrialized country parties to follow up this meeting with actions that give

real meaning to the elegant words of the Convention - and by that I mean listen to the scientific evidence, apply the precautionary principle, take the necessary difficult decisions and begin serious programs of emissions reductions, for the sake of us all.

Thank you, Madame President.