

STATEMENT by
His Excellency, Mr. LEO A. FALCAM
Vice President of the
Federated States of Micronesia

before the

Fourth Conference of the Parties
to the
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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Madame President, distinguished Ministers, delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

I am very honored to have the opportunity, once again, to address the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is a special privilege to be here in the beautiful capital of Argentina, a city which seems to have been named for this occasion. It is also fitting that after so many years of strong leadership in the process of this Convention, Argentina steps forward once again at a very critical juncture. I join all others here in expressing appreciation to the Government and people of Argentina for providing this magnificent venue.

This Convention stands at the top of my Government's priority list among all our activities in international relations, because it is concerned with a global phenomenon that already is causing our people to suffer, and which, in the longer term, if not dealt with, will bring total and permanent destruction to our homeland. This is not idle talk, nor political rhetoric. The people of my country suffered terribly from being caught in the middle of conflict between warring industrial powers fifty years ago, but as tragic as that was, it is possible over time to recover from the ravages of war. Conversely, unless something is done in this case, and soon, global warming will destroy us forever, and by the time that happens, the rest of the planet will be on an irreversible track toward devastation that makes even modern warfare pale by comparison. It is inconceivable that all the nations of the world, gathered in congress to examine the problem, could allow this to happen.

Madame President:

A year ago, at Kyoto, the peoples of the world most immediately threatened by climate change breathed a sigh of relief when it appeared that the global community had settled on commencing a course of action. While we were disappointed that the first steps outlined in the Kyoto Protocol

fell far short of the Berlin Mandate, we nevertheless applauded the outcome for giving the world a starting point in terms of legally binding steps to reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses.

Even at that time, despite the solid scientific consensus among the world's experts on this subject, some remained unconvinced as to the urgency of taking real steps to address the buildup of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. Still more governments accepted the reality of the problem, but chose then, and apparently still choose, to embrace the early philosophy of St. Francis, "God, make me a servant of thine, but not yet awhile."

What has happened to the global climate in the single year since Kyoto? You yourself, Madame President, have directed attention to climatic disasters that have caused the deaths of thousands, most recently in Honduras and Nicaragua, and delegates here paused in respect for the victims of that terrible tragedy. But the list grows. Horrendous floods in low-lying areas of Bangladesh also cost thousands of lives. Glaciers in the Andes and elsewhere continue to recede at unprecedented rates. Warming trends in Antarctica recently brought about the collapse into the sea of an icepack the size of Luxembourg, and other similar events could be cited.

I would be remiss, Madame President, if I did not also point out that my own country, the Federated States of Micronesia, also within the past year, has experienced life-threatening effects of the climatic phenomenon of El Nino that brought severe droughts to our normally verdant islands, and necessitated large-scale international emergency assistance to avoid catastrophe. The El Nino/La Nina cycle is not unknown to our region, but the unpredicted increase in its intensity, together with increasing storm activity in areas with no such historical record, is having a very real adverse effect upon the lives of our people - now- not sometime in the future. Regardless of whether the full extent of predicted sea-level rise is realized, the people of my country are already beginning to take a different view of our traditional provider and protector, the ocean.

Madame President:

The assignment for this session of the Conference of the Parties has been, and in my view continues to be, to prepare for implementing the Kyoto Protocol - not to backslide from the undertakings at Kyoto, and not to take refuge in the complexities of the task to find reasons for further delay, but to move forward. I am disturbed to hear from my technical staff covering these negotiations that this session may be headed toward bogging down with the burden of finding concrete ways to implement the Kyoto Protocol. I am frankly appalled that there seems to be some acceptance that this Conference will be nothing more than a "working discussion," looking toward real decisions a year from now, or even later. Meanwhile, it appears that those who would prefer to hinder the process are taking maximum advantage of the situation. This is completely at odds with the principle behind the mandate which was put in place at the First Conference of the Parties in Berlin, and which has been pursued so diligently by the parties ever since. It is also at odds with the human urgency that is now more pressing, literally, with each passing day.

Madame President:

Coming here only during the High-Level Segment I run a certain risk of not taking sufficient account of the hard work of the delegates over the past few weeks. But it occurs to me that, even now, it is not too late to appeal for movement during this Session. I recall that when I made my statement at Kyoto last year it seemed, at that moment, as though there was little prospect for a strong outcome. Yet, with determined effort and even all-night sessions, the Kyoto Protocol was achieved.

It may be that in this Session the goal is not as readily defined in a technical sense, but I say to you and to all here present that there is clear evidence of even more critical urgency than was seen a year ago to take concrete steps to move this process forward. Rather than conclude in a negative way, I choose to express faith and confidence that the Spirit of Kyoto survives, and will inspire our negotiators to meet the challenge that faces us all.

Not one person in this room, Madame President, should put aside or forget your challenge that we should "adopt the appropriate measures to stop the effects of the climate change." For its part, the Federated States of Micronesia is now at the final stage of ratifying the Protocol. I join you in your call for us all to give the best of ourselves, and also to commit ourselves to take the steps necessary to ensure a livable future.

Thank you, Madame President.