

**NATIONAL STATEMENT AT THE
United Nations Conference on
Sustainable Development- Rio +20**

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Madam President Dilma Roussef, the Chair of the Conference, Excellencies, Mr. Secretary-General, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me, at the outset, take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to Her Excellency President Rousseff and the people of Rio de Janeiro for your warmth and gracious hospitality.

Excellencies,

“While the Marshall Islands understands the reluctance of some nations to fully commit to binding and definitive agreements at this time, we are also deeply concerned that if there is not a consensus to undertake serious preventative and restorative action on a global scale, time may run out.”

These were the words spoken at the first Rio Earth Summit, at this very site, two decades ago by His Excellency Amata Kabua, the first President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Reflecting on my predecessor’s prophetic words, I now must tell the world that, twenty years later, Time Has Run Out.

Excellencies,

The Marshall Islands is a small Pacific island nation sitting less than two meters above sea level in the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean. With the world now sitting on the sharp edge of a catastrophic environmental tipping point, what were deemed distant risks twenty years ago have become increasingly evident realities.

We have no more time to waste on the damaging North-South politics that have undermined these negotiations. In the absence of collective action, the world's most vulnerable nations will be the victims. This is not the future we want.

All nations are equal in this place. I am greatly concerned at the exclusion of certain island states from participating in this crucial global forum. Every country, including those not represented here, has the responsibility to ensure the long-term viability and survival of its people, its cultures, and its nationhood. But this challenge is a generational one, and must be tackled collectively. The world's most vulnerable cannot be 'collateral damage' for other nations' economic growth.

Action speaks louder than words, particularly when it comes to the obscure and inadequate words negotiated here in Rio. Sustainable development is best measured through results – the successes and failures – witnessed everyday, on the ground, in local communities. The Marshall Islands is not waiting for others to act. We are leading with action towards a sustainable future.

Excellencies,

Many see the Marshall Islands as a small island state. In reality, we are a “large ocean nation”. Our green economy is really a “blue economy”, and our fisheries are by far our most precious resource. We have to protect this resource, even over the apparent objections of large, distant fishing nations licensed by us.

With other Pacific nations, including the Parties to the Nauru Agreement, we are setting the global pace on sustainable fisheries. As stewards of more than half of the world's tuna, these Parties are taking actions to ensure a sustainable fishery, sharply curb overfishing, and advance our development aspirations. We have put a ban on high seas fishing as a condition of access to our rich waters. With retail partners, we are certifying our own Pacific brand of free school skipjack tuna with the Marine Stewardship Council. And we have also established the world's largest shark sanctuary, through a national ban on finning.

Through the Micronesia Challenge, we have committed ourselves to one of the world's most ambitious targets to conserve our coastal areas and land. We are achieving these goals through our sustainable financing plan and endowment, and welcome new partners.

Excellencies,

For centuries, our traditional leaders and communities have set aside reefs and coastal fisheries in conservation areas to sustain the coral reef and island resources we depend upon. The Namdrik atoll community, recipient last night of the Equator Prize here in Rio, is

one proud example of our conservation achievements.

It is known to all in this room that the window to avoid long-term irreversible harm from climate change is closing, and will slam shut well before the end of this decade. The earlier we act, the greater our chance of avoiding a climate catastrophe. While more must be done to support adaptation to the already intensifying impacts of climate change, for the Marshall Islands and other low-lying atoll nations – climate change poses a very different set of risks. Our territorial integrity is threatened and our very statehood is on the line. Global emissions have continued to rise in the two decades since Rio, and I appeal to all of you to demonstrate leadership and take urgent action in whatever form or package works best. As I said earlier, time has now run out.

Excellencies,

In sustainable development, as in climate change, SIDS are a special case. Our unique vulnerabilities have worsened over the last two decades due to increased exposure to external shocks, climate change, natural disasters, and fuel, food, and financial crises. These problems are made worse by the lack of incoming support, and the failure to direct support towards actual projects on the ground. Support needs to more directly address each country's self-determined priorities, particularly when it comes to the most vulnerable island states.

Excellencies,

The world has no more time to spend pursuing unsustainable energy policies, and we have run out of both time and patience for countries, especially the largest emitters, to continue evading their

responsibility.

We call on the world, for our very survival, to accelerate transformation of the energy sector to fully renewable and low carbon energy sources. Leading by example, the Marshall Islands, with support from Japan and SIDS DOCK, is undertaking a feasibility study for OTEC, Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion, which uses the deep ocean temperature differential to generate electricity, fresh water, and hydrogen – the building blocks of sustainable development in small island states. If successful, OTEC will usher in a new era of integrated sustainability and turn the Marshall Islands from an oil-dependent country into a renewable energy exporter.

Excellencies,

As world leaders today, we must seize this opportunity to embrace sustainable development and social and environmental justice.

Twenty years after Rio – we know from our own experience that true action to achieve sustainable development is not only possible, but is already taking shape. But so much more remains to be done to reverse our dangerous and unsustainable global direction. If the low-lying Marshall Islands goes by the wayside, it will be the irresponsible precursor to a threatened future for all.

Two decades ago, world leaders had hopes, aspirations and concerns. Today, we only have time for action.

Kommool tata and I thank you all.