



**Remarks by His Excellency Surangel S. Whipps, Jr.  
President of the Republic of Palau  
General Debate of the 76th Session  
of the United Nations General Assembly  
21 September 2021, New York**

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen, it is a privilege to speak before this esteemed body for the first time. I bring warm greetings from the people of the Republic of Palau. My sincere congratulations to Mr. Abdulla Shahid on your election as President of the 76<sup>th</sup> session, and I commend Mr. Volkan Bozkir on his leadership during the previous session.

Ladies and gentlemen, our 76th session convenes at a unique time in United Nations' history. Member states are still confronted with the monumental task of solving the COVID-19 pandemic. On behalf of the people of Palau, we applaud and salute the first responders, doctors, nurses, public health professionals, and all those who have worked and continue to diligently respond to this pandemic; including the scientists, pharmaceutical companies, civil society, governments, and all others who have taken the lead in creating lifesaving vaccines and innovative treatments in swift response.

Palau would also like to thank all our international allies and friends who came to our aid during this difficult time, especially the United States, Taiwan, Japan, and Australia who delivered COVID-19 vaccines, PPE, testing capacity, and vital training to the people

of Palau, which allowed us to remain COVID-free through most of this pandemic, and now COVID-safe with over 80% of our total population fully vaccinated and with zero deaths or hospitalizations. The people of Palau are eternally grateful for your friendship, generosity, and cooperation.

Along these lines, we would like to highlight the Republic of China -Taiwan's leadership in the global response against COVID-19. Not only have they demonstrated consistent and effective management of the pandemic within their borders, but their leadership has also extended to Palau. Taiwan's international response facilitated cooperation and implementation of an effective sterile travel corridor between Taiwan and Palau. This sterile corridor has allowed Taiwan and Palau to resume medical and educational cooperation, and recoup economic engagement and other benefits of international travel. We encourage the UN system to accept Taiwan as a valuable contributor to our collective efforts and strongly advocate for Taiwan's participation in the UN system.

On behalf of the People of Palau, we also extend our deepest condolences to those whose lives have been impacted by the pandemic; our prayers go out to you and your loved ones. We also pray that we'll further band together to find more equitable approaches to subdue the pandemic, and continue the healing and economic recoveries of our people, communities and nations.

Ladies and gentlemen, if there is to be a silver lining in this pandemic, it's the strength of human resolve. In record time, we mobilized global resources and information to send protective equipment around the world, and created numerous vaccines and treatments to counteract the COVID-19 virus. Although more can and must be done in

our efforts to contain the pandemic, the global community responded to the threat of despair by taking action, and working at break-neck speed to contain the coronavirus. Today, I ask our global community to take the same level of urgency and bold action in responding to the existential threat of climate change.

In April of this year, Palau, which historically is outside the Pacific Typhoon Belt, was hit by Typhoon Surigae, our 3<sup>rd</sup> typhoon since 2012, which damaged 20% of our homes, and destroyed major infrastructure, including our aquaculture facilities. It also destroyed millions of dollars in crops, and wreaked significant havoc on our reefs and corals, consequently undermining Palau's food security. This is particularly notable because Palau and other SIDS depend on imported and highly processed food products due to lack of economies of scale as a result of our small populations, resulting in significant increases in NCDs among our people. While there is potential for increased local production, our efforts are hampered by the adverse impacts of climate change including rising sea levels, typhoons, droughts and other stress on marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

The gradual destruction of climate change has allowed us to be complacent and to respond by kicking the can down the road. However, ladies and gentlemen, the IPCC Report has indicated that we are running out of time. Simply put, we must act NOW to ensure our children inherit a healthy and reliable future. We need to act NOW before further irreparable damage is made to our planet. As a SIDS nation, we stand here as one of the States most vulnerable to climate change, and we urge fast and comprehensive multilateral action to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Ocean-based climate action can play a significant role in shrinking the world's carbon footprint. The Ocean Panel has commissioned research that found ocean-based climate action can deliver up to a fifth (21%) of the annual greenhouse gas emissions cuts needed to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2050.

One of our major issues in addressing the risks of climate change and the climate-ocean nexus is our inability and lack of capacity in accessing climate financing. This further exacerbates our vulnerabilities, and we are not alone in this respect. Of the 20% of climate financing provided on adaption, ONLY 2% of that support went to SIDS countries. Further, of that 2%, at least half of those funds were not in the form of grants, but in the form of loans. We urge the UN to address this inequity and reduce the artificial barriers to allowing small countries to access climate finance, and for the UN to create systems that address its Charter to represent "*We the peoples*"- for all people.

As a SIDS country, Palau relies heavily on the ocean - not only as its main economic engine via tourism and fisheries, but also for its food security. A recent study on the Palau National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS) by Stanford University stated that rising temperatures will produce warmer waters that hold less oxygen. These twin pressures will cause tuna and billfish that have particularly high oxygen requirements to migrate, in search of areas with cooler waters and higher oxygen concentrations. These analyses project a 40% decline in skipjack and yellowfin biomass in Palau's waters by 2100 if we continue on this high emissions trajectory.

As Palau prepares to host the 7<sup>th</sup> Our Ocean Conference in February 2022, we reaffirm our commitment to sustainably manage, use and conserve our oceans. In 2015, we declared most of our EEZ as the Palau National Marine Sanctuary, but this is not

enough. We need global action. It's time that the international community commits to establishing a 30% target that focuses on marine protected areas within and beyond national jurisdictions.

Mr. President, many of the challenges that will be presented here this week must be addressed within the framework of the United Nations as the custodian of the world. To this point, Palau is undergoing a renewal of its Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the United States. This relationship was the result of the UN's historic role in assigning trusteeship to the U.S. to administer our islands as part of a strategic trust territory, with the duty of developing the territory into full self-government and self-reliance. After seven (7) referendums, the People of Palau agreed to the Compact of Free Association in 1994, allowing the U.S. to exercise fundamental elements of our national sovereignty: control of our national security and defense. This enabled the U.S. to deny other nations access to our lands and waters, ultimately restricting our association with some members of the international community and limiting prospective economic development opportunities.

In this regard, previous COFA reconsiderations have been unsuccessful because of inadequate regard of the complex dynamics of the modern world and the compounding vulnerabilities Palau is challenged with. Regardless, I am confident that the new U.S. administration will rise to the task and correct the deficiencies in our previous deliberations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as the eldest or "big brother" in my family, the safety, security and well-being of my siblings was ultimately my responsibility. We grew up in our community as a collective unit whereby "I" was always synonymous with "we." This

reassured us that no one would be left out and reinforced the principle that each of us reflected the stability and character of the family and extended community. This is a fundamental Palauan principle which I believe signifies the Pacific way and reflects the UN system.

Mr. President, this family, the United Nations, has an opportunity to reconcile global issues and, through its collective membership, take actions necessary to develop and implement innovative and crucial solutions. This is our mandate, and we must not fail.

In Palau, many different fishes of the ocean are painted on our traditional Chiefs meeting houses (*“Abai”*) - sharks symbolizing bravery, stingrays symbolizing steadfastness, and the Surgeon fish (*“Mesekuuk”*) symbolizing unity. The Surgeon fish represents a unique characteristic. They are grazers and roam around the reef alone eating algae. But once danger lurks, they all swim quickly from wherever they are along the reef and come together in a large school resembling an intimidating ocean animal to provide safety and security for all. The nations of this world must act like the surgeon fish and all come together including Taiwan. Taiwan’s 23.5 million people must also be given a voice, as our UN charter states “We the peoples.” All the nations working together, we can overcome the challenges of our time, from COVID to climate, and act with integrity and resolve to leave a better world for our children.

Mr. President, Brothers and Sisters of the UN – I am proud to stand among you and champion a brighter and more sustainable world. God bless us all. Kom kmal mesulang. Thank You!