

**Remarks by His Excellency Surangel S. Whipps, Jr.
President of the Republic of Palau on behalf of the
Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) Statement
United Nations Ocean Conference
27 June 2022 in Lisbon, Portugal**

Presidents, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies, and Gentlemen.

I am honored to speak on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States. I extend our congratulations to the Presidents, on their assumption of the Presidency of this 2nd UN Ocean Conference and assure you of our full support.

Allow me to present a shortened version of the PSIDS statement.

We are alarmed by the multiple dire crises facing our ocean, from ever-rising temperature to other anthropogenic stressors that continue to threaten its health. International efforts, at all levels, are desperately needed now to improve and sustain the health, productivity, and resilience of our Ocean.

Plastic pollution is of serious concern. The Pacific contributes less than 1.3% of mismanaged plastic pollution yet we are grossly and disproportionately affected by its impacts. Based on current projections, there will be more plastics in the Ocean than fish by 2050.

We welcome the decision to convene an intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop an internationally legally binding instrument on plastic pollution that includes the marine environment which must address the role played by all stakeholders at all stages of the plastics lifecycle.

Our concerns over climate change and its effects on the Ocean also extend to the preservation of our maritime zones. The rights and the entitlements that flow from our territorial boundaries must be preserved without reduction even in the face of rising sea levels. The Pacific SIDS position, reflected in the Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate-Change Related Sea-Level Rise, is that preserving maritime zones and the rights and entitlements that flow from them brings much-needed equity and stability and gives expression to the core principles of international law and human rights, and the notions of climate justice deeply rooted in human rights and international law.

As a global industry, international shipping is responsible for 3% of global greenhouse gas emissions. A holistic regional approach would increase the sustainability of Pacific shipping, given the rather slow global response in addressing this issue. Sustainable shipping is reliant on safe and clean ships which are the responsibility of vessel owners.

We hope that the *UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development*, will generate the global ocean science needed to support the sustainable development of our shared ocean. We continue to emphasize the vital role of the traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local

communities in connection with understanding and managing the Ocean, including in the implementation of the *Decade*, such traditional knowledge being a complement to science.

The 7th Our Ocean Conference held in Palau in April this year was an immense success in addressing gaps and challenges that SIDS continues to face in realizing the full potential the ocean has to offer, including through ocean-based economies. We look forward to the pledges and commitments coming on stream sooner rather than later.

Mr. President,

Of all the SDGs, SDG 14 is by far the least funded, representing only 0.01% of all SDG funding, less than 2% from Green Climate Fund (GCF), and only 0.7% of Global Environmental Facility (GEF). We must attract and retain sustainable and responsible public and private investment, including foreign direct investment through blending, guarantees, and other innovative financial instruments, paying particular attention to women and youth.

Credit support for tourism businesses and social protection for tourism workers are additional levers that could help SIDS recover faster from the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing remain a huge concern for Pacific SIDS economies, as are harmful fisheries subsidies. Acidification of the ocean destroying entire reef ecosystems, thereby affecting fish populations, remains a critical concern and a threat to fisheries which are the lifeblood of Pacific economies.

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by speaking briefly about the importance of preserving marine ecosystems and biodiversity both within and beyond national jurisdiction. Ecosystems such as mangroves,

seagrass, and coral reefs are essential but under threat. Preserving marine ecosystems has multiple benefits relating to climate change, food security, and resilience to coastal erosion.

PSIDS supports the adoption of a strong international legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), which allows for holistic planning and management of the ocean and its biodiversity.

Mr. President,

We must accept the need for transformative change aimed at halting and reversing the decline in the health of ocean ecosystems and biodiversity and protecting and restoring its resilience and ecological integrity.

**Remarks by His Excellency Surangel S. Whipps, Jr.
President of the Republic of Palau
United Nations Ocean Conference
27 June 2022 in Lisbon, Portugal**

Mr. President,

Allow me to share what is happening in Palau and how we, as a nation and as a people, are taking action.

As a child, I would play on the reef and spearfish with my father to provide food and income for our family. As a teen, I traveled on a fishing boat with my father to a remote island in Palau. The island was teeming with life—birds, turtles, fish and giant clams. Two years ago, I was able to visit that same island with my own children and witnessed the magic of turtles laying their eggs. While the ocean was still full of life and the birds were there in mass, tragically, we learned that the turtle nesting beaches had eroded due to sea-level rise, and half of the eggs that were laid that night would never survive because they were laid in the tidal zone. This was heartbreaking but it is a reality we all face. The fate of the turtles is the same as the fate of our homes, our culture, and all that sustains our people.

I was fortunate to be able to share this experience with my children as I did with my father. But what about our children's children? My actions and decisions as President of Palau are rooted in my hope as a father to pass on to my daughter, Moded, who is here with me today, a productive ocean, just as my father did to me.

We must take bold innovative actions. WE can no longer be held hostage to fossil fuels. This year, Palau is committing to generating 100% of its energy from renewable sources by 2032. This is a monumental undertaking for a small island country and will require support from other governments and the NGO community through the deployment of both innovative technologies and technical capacity.

Palau's has also launched a comprehensive Blue Prosperity Plan. The Plan includes the development of sustainable fisheries, restorative aquaculture, high-value ecotourism and

innovative business models, all designed to deliver optimal economic benefits while protecting Palau's ecological resources.

Our Blue Prosperity Plan strives for a 100% sustainably managed ocean. Its foundation is a participatory, inclusive, and science-based marine spatial planning process that aims to balance protection of the Ocean with sustainable fisheries production.

To implement this plan over the next several years, we will work with partners to better understand the vital habitats in our waters worthy of high-level protection while also working to identify the key spawning grounds and migratory routes for our valuable fish stocks.

All of this will help us design a conservation framework that optimizes benefits to conservation, food security, and local livelihoods. Building on our Palau National Marine Sanctuary, created in 2015, we commit to growing regional cooperation for 100% management of the Pacific Ocean as we move collectively toward our global ambition of 30x30.

Palau has taken bold steps to protect our ocean: however, we cannot do it alone; WE MUST ALL ACT TOGETHER!

We need all of humanity, including the 23 million people in Taiwan, to be part of the solution. The shirt I am wearing today is an example of innovative solutions to addressing pollution it was made from recycled plastic bottles collected in Palau and turned into this beautiful shirt in Taiwan. We need to look beyond our differences, work towards our common ocean challenges and STOP using our ocean as a garbage dump.

I would like to end with the Palauan legend about a fisherman from the village of Ngerchemai in Palau. One day he went out fishing on his canoe. He came upon a large turtle and hastily jumped into the water after it. Surfacing for a breath, he realized his canoe wasn't anchored and was drifting away. He then looked at the turtle and it was swimming away. He could not decide which

one he should pursue. In doing so, he lost both the canoe and the turtle. We can no longer afford to be indecisive.

We must make commitments. We must be adaptive. We can no longer afford to just talk, we need action. We need all nations to work towards a 100% sustainably managed ocean protecting a minimum of 30% of global biodiversity by 2030.

Ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development is our collective responsibility. We must do it for our children and the generations to come.

Thank you. Kom Kmal Mesulang.