

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS



STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. PHILLIP MULLER,
AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS TO THE UNITED NATIONS,
DURING THE AGRICULTURE SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PREPARATORY MEETING
FOR THE 17TH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
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Madame Chair,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands congratulates you on your chairmanship and aligns itself with the statements made by Grenada on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, and by Papua New Guinea on behalf of the Pacific Small Island States.

Madame Chair,

For SIDS, our economies of scale are often limited, and our geography is remote. As a result, our increasingly urbanized communities have grown dependant upon imported food at the expense of our traditional crops; we are thus uniquely vulnerable to global price shocks, often at the expense of rural communities who could benefit from increased domestic agricultural production. At the same time, our land upon which we would produce our crops, the water which sustains them, and the coral reefs and marine areas which would otherwise generate our subsistence fisheries, are threatened by the already-visible climate change impacts including coastal erosion, warming temperatures, ocean acidification, and salinization of our thin freshwater lens.

For some SIDS, the food crisis can thus provide a stimulus not only for increased domestic agricultural production of our traditional crops for subsistence, but also to address, in a comprehensive fashion, climate change adaptation in a manner which moves beyond enabling activities, and towards direct national implementation.

In 2008 the FAO noted the need for the Pacific to further mainstream climate change into areas of agriculture, food security and coastal management, and to move the commitments of international political debates into implementation of "action on the ground" for our local communities.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands has responded to the 2008 FAO report by developing a national strategy which addresses food security, builds our domestic agriculture and addresses our vulnerability to coastal erosion through coconut tree replanting and rehabilitation, using drought -sensitive species. This initiative will reduce our unhealthy reliance on imported foods by boosting domestic agricultural production of our traditional crops. In addition, strategic planting of native species along our coastline will reduce the ever-growing vulnerability to coastal erosion. We seek the interest of partners in upscaling this project, which may be a valuable model for other SIDS and developing nations.

Madame Chair,

For small Pacific island nations such as my own, it is difficult to discuss food security and agriculture without addressing other thematic sustainable development topics, including land, water, erosion and rural development, and how all of these topics, for us, face immediate and long-term threats of climate change, which has become a truly cross-cutting issue for the Pacific and other SIDS. While we welcome the mobilization of key international funding mechanisms, we need to continue with two key goals – ensuring actual direct access to funding mechanisms, and the upscaling and mainstreaming of climate change adaptation strategies across all development sectors. Until barriers to funding are actually eliminated, unless we strengthen our own national capacity to capture projects, and until we arrive at non-competitive funding mechanisms, all of the political commitment for direct access will fail to turn into meaningful and observable results in our communities. Simply put, our small nations are at risk of becoming lost in the paperwork process.