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Your Excellency President Remengesau,
Prime Minister Ingraham of the Bahamas,
Minister Gabriel, President of the Ninth Conference of the Parties to the CBD,
Minister Morgan of the Seychelles,
Minister Randriarimanana of Madagascar,
Minister Aguinaga of Ecuador,
Vice Minister Santana of the Dominican Republic,
Director General Marton-Lefèvre of IUCN,
Mr. Fonseca of the Global Environmental Facility,

Dear participants,

The Global Islands Partnership, GLISPA, is all about commitments to action. It is about islands taking charge of their own fate, in view of the unprecedented threat to one of their most essential economic, social and cultural assets – biological diversity.

Tonight we will celebrate the significant progress by island nations and nations with islands around the world. Since GLISPA was announced only two years ago at COP 8 in Brazil, we have had the privilege of learning about inspiring developments in the Micronesia Challenge, Kiribati, the Caribbean and the Coral Triangle, and about global leadership on island issues by Italy, New Zealand, the Global Environment Facility and others. We honour each of these leaders and their many partners tonight, and we celebrate the results of the discussions on islands at COP 9. I congratulate all of you on these achievements and indeed, thank you for your efforts to conserve biological diversity.

Protecting biodiversity and establishing protected areas in islands makes sense from all sides: it is critical to their economies; valuable from the point of view of biodiversity science; essential for cultural preservation, and feasible from a practical perspective. As we all know islands harbour a proportionally high level of endangered species, due to their isolation and fragility. Thirty per cent of the world's conservation hotspots are on islands, even though islands represent less than five per cent of the land surface. Fifty per cent of recorded species extinction in the last 400 years occurred on islands. Islands cannot allow this critical asset to be lost anymore. It is an essential component if islands are to achieve the Millennium Development goals, as President Remengesau has just shared with us in the high-level panel discussion on Biodiversity for Development and Poverty Alleviation many of us just attended prior to this dinner event.

Countries like New Zealand and Australia are world leaders in ecosystem restoration - eliminating invasive species, re-colonizing islands with endemic species, and even discussing how to bring in "niche" species that would substitute others already gone extinct. Very recently, the creation of large marine protected areas (in the United States, in Kiribati, and in Micronesia) has significantly increased the chances for island biodiversity and the variety of life in the surrounding waters.

Islands are leading the world in protecting our threatened marine resources. Since COP-8, the largest marine protected areas were created in Kiribati and the islands of Hawaii in the US. Several island Parties, such as Grenada, the Seychelles, Bahamas, the Dominican Republic and Madagascar, are leading the way in achieving the 2010 biodiversity target. At this COP, the Parties are focusing on the challenge of invasive species and, once again, islands are providing leadership and valuable lessons for us all. Countries like New Zealand, Ecuador and Australia are

world leaders in controlling and eliminating invasive species on their islands and restoring or re-colonizing islands with endemic species. This is just one example of how islands serve as living laboratories for global conservation issues, and particularly for adaptation to the potentially negative impacts of climate change.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and developing States composed mostly of islands, represent up to 25 per cent of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). However, in many ways they face far greater impacts from habitat loss and coastal pollution due to their near-complete dependence on biodiversity resources and tourism. All forms of environmental degradation directly affect islanders' lives and livelihoods. The Island Biodiversity Programme of Work is a comprehensive strategy for addressing all of these challenges. The island biodiversity programme of work is also important to overseas territories and domains, administered in different ways by countries, harbouring critical biodiversity resources, and often facing similar challenges as developing island countries.

The Global Island Partnership is an excellent example of how island States and States with islands are taking action and mobilizing resources and partnerships to protect their natural assets and their future livelihoods. These are exciting times for the island biodiversity programme of work, I am very glad to witness these groundbreaking developments, and look forward to tonight's commitments. Your inspiring action and collaboration is an example to all and I am pleased to commit the Secretariat's continued support of GLISPA. Thank you.