

**Hon. Elias Camsek Chin**  
**Vice-President of the Republic of Palau**

Thank you Madam and may I thank President Michel sincerely for this opportunity. Good afternoon Excellencies and Friends.

I am honored to be here today in Mauritius with my island friends to discuss the issues that we face. I would like to extend the apology of President Tommy E. Remengesau Jr., of Palau, who had intended to be here with you this week, but due to pressing matters at home had to remain in Palau.

I would also like to thank all of our very distinguished speakers. You have all confronted and clarified different aspects of the battle we all face in our struggle to save our coral reefs that are critical to livelihoods of our people. One truth becomes clear from your remarks. Our future and our economic health and wealth depend on the preservation of our environments. For us, our environment is our future. And for Small Island Developing States, the health of our coral reefs serves as a portrait of the success of our efforts.

Like President Remengesau, I am an optimist. We strongly believe that our cultural and economic strengths will ultimately outweigh our unique challenges. We also believe that we will, as communities, as island countries and as sea dominated regions, achieve our development goals in this new Millennium.

This is not to say that our voyage will be simple or that we will not hit snags along the way. Planning our futures would not be nearly as much fun if our course was straight and our ultimate destination was clear. So I suggest that we enjoy the cruise, always aware that there are frequently dangerous sharks in our beautiful and bountiful ocean waters.

Our cruise, whether it be toward economic development or environmental protection, must begin with the concept of comprehensive and integrated planning. In the area of environmental protection, we have undertaken to ensure that environmental issues are given consideration in our planning process at every level. We have accomplished this through the establishment of a strong National Environmental Protection Council (NEPC), with representation from all sectors of our society, both public and private. We have also created the Office of Environmental Response and Coordination (OERC), which monitors all environmental programs and international grants and which ensures a coordinated planning approach to environmental and sustainable development issues. We have also strengthened the administrative capacity of our Environmental Quality Protection Board, the government entity that monitors and enforces many of our environmental laws.

We know that controlled growth that recognizes future environmental issues is critical to sustainability. Therefore, we have passed numerous environmental laws and instituted numerous environmental programs.

We have established one of the most comprehensive Protected Area Network laws on the planet. This new law will allow us to better manage our existing 23 protected areas and to expand such areas through the encouragement of state set-asides and appropriate financial resources. We have also completed a draft economic valuation report with the World Bank that we hope will strengthen our efforts to define appropriate protected areas and to finance such areas with programs and fee systems.

In 2003, we also passed a shark finning law, banning this questionable and unsustainable practice in our EEZ, and extended allowable pelagic fishing to 50 miles from our shores. We must guard against these and other unsustainable fishing practices such as bottom trawling of sea mounts.

We are also working with the World Bank to establish comprehensive legislation to control the use of our marine mineral resources, including petroleum and natural gas deposits. We have also begun the process, with the assistance of the Japanese government and other international institutions, to establish a comprehensive solid waste system. We are working very closely with our regional and sub-regional neighbors to improve our chances of success in this effort. And we have completed phase I of a comprehensive zoning process that we hope will result, during phase II, in national and state zoning plans within the next five years.

We are also taking every effort possible to protect our spectacular marine and terrestrial biodiversity, not only through our protected area network but also through our efforts to combat invasive species. In this effort we have just completed numerous strategies and action plans to save our land based and marine biodiversity. Palau has contributed to the new CBD Programme of Work on Island Biodiversity and we think this Programme will be critical to all our efforts to develop sustainably.

To protect our reefs, we have also worked very diligently to establish real partnerships with our neighbors and with the international community. Next year, Palau will co-chair, with Japan, the International Coral Reef Initiative. We are also working with the World Bank and the United Nations to enhance their very important Targeted Research Program that will go a long way towards clarifying the science of coral reefs over the coming years. And through the generous grant and technical assistance of the Government of Japan, we are expanding the capacity of our own International Coral Reef Research Center, a product of a tri-partite effort between Palau, the United States and Japan. Finally, we have become a full time partner in the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, also known as NOAA, to further expand and fund our protected area network and increase our technical understanding of our coral reefs.

Friends, through these, and many other efforts, Palau is seeking to protect its future – the future of its oceans, the future of its coral reefs, and most of all, the future of its children. But we cannot do it alone. As in all of our countries, our human capacity and our technical capabilities are limited. And more importantly, our financial base is simply insufficient to implement all of the programs necessary to accomplish our goal of a sustainable future and a quality of life for our people that equates to that of our forefathers.

The leadership that has been shown here today and the connection between people and place in islands provides an opportunity to rapidly advance implementation of the 2012 target for marine conservation and make very tangible connections between the global conservation targets, set under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and local livelihoods - the recipe for sustainability. To me this is the essence of a Global Island Partnership for Marine Conservation.

Momentum of this magnitude must have a path to follow - a path that encourages more countries and more partners to make similar commitments. I therefore propose to work with the partners here today and ensure we take advantage of a number of strategic opportunities at the international level to advance this Global Island Partnership. We must use these opportunities to:

- lay out new commitments to marine protected areas and sustainable livelihoods;
- mobilise the resources that will be essential to translate these commitments into action on the ground; and
- agree on a longer term strategy that will get us from where we are today to our target in 2012.

Islands, Reefs and Communities: Committing to the Future  
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I call on all partners here today to work with us to make this Global Island Partnership a reality.

Thank You.