

Christine Dawson, Head of USA Delegation

Excellencies and distinguished guests,

It is an honour to be part of this celebration of islands, island biodiversity and island leadership. And of course to celebrate the Global Island Partnership as it moves to a new and exciting stage.

Let me first say that I am at the Department of State, which is our foreign ministry, and we are located in Washington, DC. When I first moved from the West Coast to Washington, DC I learned a secret: it's 10 square miles. It's an artificially created capital and we have a saying. "It is an island of 10 sq. miles surrounded by reality."

Of course the United States is not an island nation, but we are a nation of islands. From the islands of Guam and the Marianas, where America's day begins, to the Virgin Islands. From the tropical marine islands of Hawaii to the inland islands of Minnesota to the coastal islands of Maine, the United States values these unique and vulnerable ecosystems. This is best seen in the North-West Hawaiian islands, which President Bush designated as Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Monument in 2006. It stretches 700 miles – that's roughly from London to Istanbul. Within this area there are 4500 sq. miles of coral reef habitat that is home to more than 7,000 marine species, ¼ of which exists nowhere else.

Papahānaumokuākea remains one of the largest protected areas in the world, and Minister Nakara, we welcome you to the very small club of very large MPAs and we are happy to be number two as the Phoenix Islands have now become number one.

Due to its remoteness, Papahānaumokuākea is vulnerable to the damage of transiting vessels. We are extremely pleased that the International Maritime Organization has adopted a US proposal to designate this area as a particularly sensitive sea area and now brings with it internationally sanctioned protected measures to add to our own domestic measures, such as the requirement for vessels to register prior to transiting the area. We intend to remain vigilant in the protection of this island treasure and look forward to sharing our lessons with others who designate similar remote and extended areas.

Another of our commitments to islands is through the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) which the United States is pleased to co-chair with Mexico – and I can see many of our ICRI friends here tonight. Many of you know that ICRI is one of the first public-private partnerships and it puts together governments, international organizations, NGOs and scientific entities that are all committed and dedicated to reversing the degradation of coral reefs globally. We are particularly thrilled to be able to co-chair ICRI during the International Year of the Reef. During our two-year tenure we have committed to a plan of action to include proof reef resilience by promoting sustainable fisheries and livelihood, finding values for ecosystem services that reefs provide and strengthening integrated management. All actions that lie at the core of GLISPA's objectives of conserving island biodiversity and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

I assure you that the US will continue to commit financial resources to islands. We will continue to support the Micronesia Challenge – and President Remengesau we thank you: you challenged us and inspired us. We will continue to support programs to control the sources of pollution in the Caribbean and promote sustainable tourism in the Meso-America reef region. We will particularly look forward to supporting the Caribbean Challenge launched here tonight.

In Bali we announced our intention to support the Coral Triangle Initiative. In addition to the USD 26 million that the USAID is currently providing in marine and coastal management in that region, we are in the process of determining the level of our additional contribution to the CTI. In addition, of course, we will continue to support the GEF to which we currently provide USD 80 million a year. We are very thrilled that the GEF supports so many programs that we believe are important.

The United States is pleased to provide financial support to GLISPA, beginning with that wonderful event in Mauritius in 2005, and each year since. I am pleased to commit tonight that the US will provide financial support to GLISPA this year for the Coordination Team and to IUCN's new Islands Program to provide the implementation of the CBD Program of Work on Islands.

Small or large, marine or inland, islands connect us. We must harvest that connectivity to protect those diverse and vulnerable ecosystems. As President Remengesau said, partnerships require trust and commitment and creativity. The United States look forward to working with all of you as GLISPA partners or part of the GLISPA family to do just that.

Thank you.