



Republic of Palau
Office of the President

Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr.
President

Remarks
by
His Excellency, The Honorable
Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr.

U.S. Congress International Conservation Caucus

May 10, 2007

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen. It is an honor to address this Caucus of Congressional leaders committed to U.S. leadership in international conservation. I am also pleased to see some of the world's largest and most influential environmental groups working with this Caucus. In Micronesia, we strongly believe that the partnership between elected leaders and international organizations is one of the keys to successful conservation on our islands and throughout the world.

We are honored that the U.S. has declared this the "Year of the Pacific" in recognition of our strong ties that go back over two centuries. Today, I want to share with you a very exciting environmental initiative in my sub-region of the Pacific. I also want to highlight some important opportunities for the U.S. to join your Pacific island neighbors to advance island conservation across the Pacific and around the world.

In Micronesia, we have pinned many of our hopes and aspirations for a sustainable future on the "*Micronesia Challenge*" – an exciting new collaborative conservation effort by five governments across the Northern Pacific, including the United States. The Micronesia Challenge is a commitment by the Republic of Palau (ROP), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and two U.S. jurisdictions – the Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) – to effectively conserve at least 30% of our near-shore marine resources and 20% of our terrestrial resources by the year 2020.

Covering 6.7 million square kilometers of ocean, the Micronesia Challenge represents more than 20% of the Pacific Island region – and 5% of the largest ocean in the world. In terms of environmental impact, the Challenge will help protect at least 66 threatened species that we know of, 10% of the global total reef area and 462 coral species – that is 58% of all known corals.

While the Micronesia Challenge reflects a sub-regional effort, it is certainly not a stand-alone initiative. Rather, it is part of a much larger and growing commitment by island nations throughout the world to take the international lead in preserving primary ecosystems. This commitment, known as the “*Global Island Partnership*”, is a partnership between Island jurisdictions that developed during the Mauritius International Meeting in January of 2005 and now represents the interests of over 500 million people on 130,000 islands.

The Challenge and the Global Island Partnership recognize that our island jurisdictions are ecologically, culturally and politically connected and must take regional and global approaches to maximize our abilities to implement conservation measures and to access technical and funding assistance from governments and private partners at all levels. We also believe that if our islands stand united and move forward, together, to preserve our environments, we can truly serve as world leaders and help move the whole world towards our goal of a sustainable future.

The concept of the Micronesia Challenge was first presented at the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meeting held in Palau in late 2005. Shortly thereafter, the Challenge was formally presented to the world community in Curitiba, Brazil at the Eighth Conference of the Parties under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Since that auspicious moment, we have made significant progress in implementing our Challenge at home. Together, we are working on a “Micronesia Challenge Action Plan” and specific agreements on coordination, reporting, and the engagement of traditional and community leaders. Through this action plan, we hope to institutionalize the Challenge in our respective jurisdictions and in our region.

On the financial level, our five jurisdictions are currently working together and separately to establish the necessary funding mechanisms to implement the Challenge. In Palau, with help from The Nature Conservancy, we have developed a two-pronged financial sustainability plan for our Protected Area Network or PAN. This plan envisions the creation of a domestic revenue source of approximately \$1.8 million per year and the development of an endowment fund to generate an additional \$600,000 per year. Together, these two funding sources will allow Palau to establish the first self funded protected area network program in the developing world. Similar financial planning for the FSM, RMI, Guam and CNMI are underway.

In response to the Challenge, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Conservation International (CI) have jointly committed \$6 Million to Palau, the FSM and the RMI, to be matched by \$12 million from local, regional and international partners, to reach a sustainable financing goal of \$18 million for the first phase of the Challenge. Upon completion of more comprehensive financial plans, a new funding target will be developed to achieve the long-term goals of the Challenge.

Through the Global Island Partnership, we are working closely with island leaders – from island nations and nations with islands – to accelerate conservation leadership and action in the Pacific region and the world.

Fiji made the first bold national commitment to conservation in 2005, at the Mauritius meeting, pledging to conserve 30% of its marine resources by 2020. At the same high level event in Curitiba at which the Micronesia Challenge was introduced, the Government of Kiribati declared the establishment of the Phoenix Islands as the third largest marine protected area in the world

and the Government of Grenada committed to conserve 25% of its marine and land resources by 2020. And, in June last year, the U.S. government joined the State of Hawaii in creating the spectacular Northwestern Hawaiian Island Marine National Monument, surpassing Australia's world-famous Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in size. All of these outstanding initiatives are benefiting from greater collaboration and communication due to the Global Island Partnership.

And, in October of 2006, at the last annual Pacific Island Leaders Forum in Fiji, all member countries agreed to recognize and support the Micronesia Challenge, to develop similar commitments to conservation, and to invite regional and international development partners to support these efforts with strong technical and funding support. The leaders also requested assistance in understanding, analyzing and applying sustainable finance mechanisms that will permit us to manage our resources cost-effectively into the future. This request was met with strong support and a working group has been established to follow through on this regional commitment.

At the Forum meetings, U.S. Ambassador Larry Dinger highlighted U.S. interest in supporting and increasing collaboration with Micronesia and the wider Pacific. A first step was taken this January, when the U.S. co-hosted the "*Our Sea of Islands*" meeting in Honolulu, the first opportunity in over a decade for all Pacific islands – from countries, territories and states – to share expertise in developing and managing important marine areas. This is just the beginning of what is possible if we work together.

My friends, our five jurisdictions are moving aggressively forward with the Micronesia Challenge. And other island jurisdictions are joining us. We know that if we protect and preserve our marine and terrestrial environments, economic benefits will increasingly flow our way. And even more importantly, we will preserve the heritage of our forefathers, which stand as the foundations of our cultures.

The U.S. is a critical partner in the Micronesia Challenge, and we invite you to play a leading role in global conservation through the Global Island Partnership. This Year of the Pacific is the perfect time to increase collaboration between Hawaii, your U.S. island territories and your Pacific neighbors. We would all benefit greatly from sharing experience and expertise in marine resource protection, forest and watershed management, invasive species and other critical island issues.

For Palau, *The Micronesia Challenge* is the prime program focus in our efforts to ensure that we develop in a sustainable manner. But, it is much, much more than a national, sub-regional or regional environmental plan of action. It is a call to the international community to take the health of our planet seriously and to initiate the necessary actions, on a global level, to respond to the physical degradation of our planet.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at this point in time, at its beginning, the Micronesia Challenge is a vision for a healthier future. For this vision to become a reality, our effort requires the understanding, the commitment and the support of our closest partners. The region has taken great strides in converting the Micronesia Challenge from an idea into a vision with concrete commitments by all within our respective jurisdictions and our partners. In this "Year of the

Pacific” and in the years to come, please join us in our journey to preserve our planet’s remaining natural assets. While our time is limited, our goal is true. Together, we must not fail.

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For further information, contact:

Ambassador Hersey Kyota
Embassy of the Republic of Palau
Suite 400
1700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20006
Tel: 202-452-6814