

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 RURAL DEVELOPMENT SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PREPARATORY
MEETING FOR THE 17TH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
24 FEBRUARY 2008

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The Republic of the Marshall Islands aligns itself with the statements made by Tonga on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, and by Fiji on behalf of the Pacific Small Island States.

Madame Chair,

For many small island developing states, rural communities serve as the guardians of our traditional cultural identity. Many economic and social drivers have greatly increased urbanization in our cities which struggle to meet growing infrastructure demands.

Madame Chair,

To effectively address climate vulnerabilities we must strengthen our rural communities. It is these communities who are already most distant from disaster relief programs and who struggle to access market opportunities and essential social, educational and health services. Our pristine rural areas are also the destinations which are most likely to attract future tourism. The multifold impacts of climate change, combined with existing stresses, threaten the very backbone of our development.

Comprehensive climate adaptation, agricultural and rural development strategies must be owned by our local communities and should focus on using a combination of local leadership, science and traditional knowledge to achieve the conservation and strengthening of our most important and vulnerable resources. Our land, our people and our resources, and indeed our nationhood are indeed closely interlinked.

We are pursuing "bottom up" local strategies, such as the sub-regional Micronesia Challenge, in which our government works closely with traditional rural communities to build community resiliency while also defining integrated planning approaches to climate vulnerability, coastal and land management, as well as traditional and subsistence fishing. We are proud that the Micronesia Challenge is one of the world's most ambitious conservation goals, and it is an important part of our approach to climate adaptation. Our bilateral partners, as well as The Nature Conservancy and the GEF, are working towards strengthening the Micronesia Challenge as a long-term model in which we address shared global goals through sub-regional informal commitment with other nations, existing national mechanisms and, most importantly, the voices and ideas of our rural communities.

Madame Chair,

It is not enough for us collectively to further define policy options, especially in the areas of rural development and related cross-cutting issues. For SIDS, many of the policy options have been already identified and studied. What remain to be addressed are the barriers between political commitments and the realities in our local communities.

In this regard, the direct partnership Memorandum of Understanding between Pacific Island nations and Italy/Austria and the City of Milan serves as a helpful model in showing how national action can address shared development priorities, through "action on the ground." We look forward to the CSD as a platform which interlinks broad policy options directly to partnerships and funding strategies which make an immediate difference in building the resiliency of our rural communities to face the complex challenges which lie ahead.