

# *General Assembly Speech*

## *The Honorable Elias Camsek Chin*

### *Vice President of the Republic of Palau*

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

First, I would like to offer the apologies of the President of Palau, Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr., who had planned to be here with you this week, but due to pressing matters at home, was unable to attend this very important anniversary conference.

In his stead, it is a great honor for me to speak before this distinguished group of delegates to this very important meeting to discuss the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Mr. Chairman, we certainly have our work cut out for us.

Friends, the issues that we face are many and our time is short to effectively respond to our immediate and long-term sustainable development issues. When the Barbados Programme of Action was developed in 1994, it was the hope of everyone that significant progress would result over the next ten years in the sustainable expansion of our economies. As we are all aware, this has not been the case. In fact, we have maintained the same development course as we have over the last 30 years, a growth rate of less than 1%, population growth of over 3% and ever-increasing stress on our environments, our social fabric and our cultures. It is clearly time to reassess our basic assumptions and to move forward with creativity and vigor. This process provides us with the opportunity to re-examine our performance under the guidelines set forth in Barbados and improve our strategies for the coming decade.

Before we try to review the performance of the International Community in assisting and financing the development goals of Small Island Developing States, we must first appraise our own performances. My fellow delegates, we have always been aware of the many challenges that face our small island economies: unique vulnerabilities; limited resource bases; great distances from primary markets; costly public administration; lack of capacity; and the increasing impacts of external pressures. We have also been aware of our unique strengths, our marine resources, our biodiversity and our unique cultures.

Mr. Chairman, it is time that we come to grips with both our strengths and our weaknesses and carve out a prosperous future for our people, our islands and our region. While we must certainly depend on our regional and international trade partners for assistance, we are ultimately responsible for our own futures, our own sustainable development and our own cultural and economic health.

In order to guide our own destinies, we must move away from excuses and begin the rapid process of implementing modern comprehensive sustainable economic development strategy frameworks. For each of us, these frameworks must be unique and must fit our own distinctive realities and situations. Each of us must establish modern legislative regimes, comprehensive infrastructure systems, integrated decision-making processes, strong macro and micro economic policies, domestic capacity and comprehensive monitoring systems. And above all, we must translate our policies into actions and implementation.

For Palau, this means that we must continue to work to modernize our tax and banking systems as well as our, foreign investment, commercial transaction, and labor laws. For Palau, this means that we must integrate environmental protection into our basic governmental planning process at every level. For Palau, this means that we must recognize that our engine of growth is our private sector and that we must do everything possible to lighten their load, including developing our basic infrastructure, limiting the burden of taxes by streamlining our government, and developing economic sectors of the economy that have the potential to support sustainable economic growth. We have identified these sectors as tourism, agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and banking.

And for Palau, this means that we must give special emphasis to protecting our natural resources. To accomplish this we have passed one of the most comprehensive Protected Area Network laws in the world

and we are diligently working to establish modern and effective solid waste, wastewater, water and fisheries and coastal protection systems. Palau looks forward to the completion and implementation of the new CBD Programme of Work on Island Biodiversity. This Programme will be critical to all island efforts to develop sustainably.

Most importantly of all, we have committed ourselves to the establishment of good governance policies that we enforce. A population that does not trust its leaders and their government institutions is unlikely to prosper in this new millennium. We owe our people leadership, and leadership is ultimately defined by a commitment to the future through honest dealing.

But Mr. Chairman, even if we make every right decision, even if we modernize every relevant law, even if we involve our people in the process of improving our own environmental and economic realities, we will not succeed unless we re-commit to a vibrant and equal partnership with the developed nations of this world. Our role in this partnership is to institute strong policies for the sustainable development of our economies. Our role is to merit the contributions that we receive from the international community through diligent and efficient implementation of development projects.

It must be the role of the developed community to re-commit its energies and its trust in our Small Island Developing States. This commitment is not demonstrated through a 50% reduction in Overseas Development Assistance over the past 10 years. This commitment is not reflected in a failure to accede to international agreements that directly relate to our, and eventually their own, survival.

Rather, this commitment, by our partners, must be reflected in expanded practical partnerships, both public and private with broader and more diverse funding opportunities. This commitment must be reinvigorated through practical national, regional and international initiatives. This commitment must be demonstrated through rapid and practical disbursing mechanisms that meet the capacities of SIDS. And most of all, this commitment must recognize the cultural and economic uniqueness of every island nation on this planet.

My friends, it is time to move to the next generation of cooperation and emphasize the implementation of our studies and our plans. Let us not just re-write the same old plans with the same old strategies and then let those plans and strategies go unfulfilled.

Rather, I propose a voyage that we take together in a canoe that will reach a destination of equal opportunity and sustainable well-being. Let us not plan our voyage and remain at the dock because we could not agree on the size and shape of our paddles. Let us not depart our harbor only to discover that we are holding our maps in different directions.

Instead, let us set a course for our mutual future that recognizes our respective goals, our respective cultures, our respective roles and our mutual destinations. I, for one, commit to the realization of our goals through the diligent implementation of our joint strategies. I only ask that you join me. In this effort, I offer my paddle so that we can begin this long voyage, and so that we can arrive, together, at our destination.