

Population STATEMENT

Remarks of His Excellency, Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr. President of the Republic of Palau

Good Afternoon everyone.

I am honored to be here today representing my country Palau and the Pacific Islands Forum as its current Chair.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I applaud the work of the United Nations Population Fund especially in the context of the Program of Action. The focus of the UNPF on the well-being of individuals and the focus on the interrelationship between population, human rights, sustainable development and economic growth is certainly relevant to all developing, and for that matter, developed nations.

I am probably one of your more unlikely speakers today, as my small island developing country has, over the past decade, achieved a near no-growth rate, has achieved the Millennium Development Goals and has demonstrated a consistent path towards sustainable development.

Yet this apparent success does not tell the whole story. With annual world-wide population growth of approximately 75 million a year, or almost 1.1%, we have simply overpopulated our planet over the past century. As a result, our industrial complex must continue to grow, not only at the "keep up" rate of 1.1%, but a much higher rate in order to deal with issues of economic equality and development. As a result, we find that we are polluting our oceans, our atmosphere, our cities and, at the end of the day, our quality of life.

In my Pacific Island region, countries generally have small populations. However in the Pacific, there are many countries with very high population densities. And because these high densities often exist in fragile atoll environments, high population densities challenge water supply systems, sanitation, and solid waste management and present serious environmental and health risks.

When you combine these unique island population problems related to distance, size and transportation, you end up with unique population problems at the social, commodity, agricultural, cultural, economic and environmental levels. So, like our larger neighbors, we too face the stresses of population on an expanding level.

Ladies and Gentlemen, while we can work around the clock analyzing the various aspects of international response to population increase, until we face the ultimate issue of population, we are simply rowing our canoes in an endless circle.

I often wonder why we all do not just come out and say it. We need to come to terms with population growth or a global disaster will find us all. If our populations stop growing, greenhouse gasses will decline. If our populations stop growing, we can implement real sustainable development that does not have to endlessly chase percentage increases of economic growth. If our populations stop growing, we can magically improve the human condition, protect human rights, reduce regional conflict, moderate biodiversity loss, protect our children, improve medical capacity, ensure food security, raise mortality rates, reduce migration and wisely plan for our national, regional and global futures.

Now of course this is possibly the greatest challenge that we can face as the race of humans on this planet, greater than climate change, greater than international conflict, greater even, than poverty, For reducing population impacts them all. But it is the primary challenge that will directly impact all of our other challenges

I therefore believe that it is time that we change our global focus and open our eyes to the large elephant in our closet and make the reduction in our global population a primary goal of this great body. Within this context, we can certainly continue to work to respond to the many impacts of expanding population. I stand ready to offer my small assistance in this effort.

Thank You.