

**H.E. Mr. David Kabua
President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
31st Special Session of the General Assembly: COVID-19
United Nations
New York
3 December 2020**

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Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies,

It is my honor to bring to you the warm greetings of Yokwe on behalf of the people and government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

I align my statement with that of Belize on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, and of Tuvalu on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands remains one of the very few Covid-free nations in the world. While rigorous border screening has effectively addressed risks as we slowly repatriate those stranded abroad, our national borders remain in near-isolation. We are thankful for our health and security, but to do so, we will continue to pay a very heavy toll. Enforcing our isolation has severely impacted our primary economic engine of fisheries, and placed severe restrictions on imports and a near halt to air travel. Also, our substantial population abroad has been deeply and disproportionately affected by Covid, both in economy and mortality. While as a nation and people we will continue to meet this challenge with all our might and will, our unique situation is incredibly difficult to sustain deep into the future.

Mr, President,

As the world moves with cautious optimism towards building back better, it is vital that all nations use this as an opportunity to pursue - and achieve - enhanced ambition on emissions reductions and to boost resilience to climate impacts. We have a key opportunity to turn commitments to the Paris Agreement and the SDGs into a firm reality.

Our attention - and that of the world - is now closely focused on vaccination, and we are thankful where fully documented and safe candidates have appeared. I welcome the sentiments from the UN General Assembly - recently reaffirmed by the G20 - regarding the expectation of equitable vaccine distribution. I remain cautiously optimistic that these noble sentiments will turn into action and commitment to truly ensure that no one

is left behind. All nations should be particularly guarded of any attempts to trade easy influence or political favor for medical assistance. It is important that the most vulnerable nations - and the most vulnerable populations within those nations - realize open and accountable access to vaccines and medical protection.

Mr. President,

We are particularly pleased that our closest partners in the Pacific have already committed to assisting us with timely delivery of vaccines as they are available early next year, in a manner which protects our entire population. Similar commitments are already underway to assist our neighboring Pacific island countries. On the basis of this commitment, we look forward to moving towards gradually reopening our borders, and scaling back our isolation.

Like many in the world, we are facing the difficult task of rebuilding and restructuring. The international system - and most importantly member states - should search deep for the lessons learned - where multilateral cooperation may have proved weak in the face of national self-interest. The world should not again face such a common crisis without more effective tools - and the political will to use them.

As a world united by shared challenges, we should all strive to emerge stronger, in health and economy. This will be a vital opportunity to address critical flaws during rebuilding - but only if we all seek to make this opportunity a reality. It is particularly important not only that the most vulnerable are safeguarded, but also that the international system takes the time to carefully understand the unique circumstances and challenges, in particular for small island developing states.

I can only hope that come next September, I will be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with fellow leaders in New York as a truly United Nations.

Thank you and kummol tata