Hon. Mr. Jemi Nashion  
Minister of Culture & Internal Affairs of the Republic of the Marshall Islands  
Sixty-Sixth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women  
United Nations New York  
Agenda Item 3: General Discussion (High Level Segment)

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Chair, Excellencies,

I have the honor to bring warm greetings of Iakwe on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

We welcome this year’s meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women as an important milestone in multilateralism in the midst of a global pandemic, and acknowledge we are meeting in unique circumstances.

This year’s priority theme is of particular importance to the Marshall Islands. The Marshall Islands is extremely vulnerable to natural disasters and susceptible to the effects of tropical storms, typhoons, storm surges, and drought. Climate change remains our greatest threat. Rising sea levels poses an existential threat to low lying atoll nations such as ours, and threatens the physical existence of our islands that are only 2 meters above sea level. The direct and indirect impacts of these threats exacerbate the existing challenges of our country, but are especially detrimental for the most vulnerable groups, such as women and girls.

With these compounding threats, the Marshall Islands has shifted its internal focus to the National Adaptation Plan, or what we call our “survival plan”, which explores extreme options such as elevating and building islands to ensure that we are able to stay in our own islands without being forced to migrate. These are costly explorations - not only financially but also culturally, as shifting the landscape of our islands impacts our culture and a complicated land tenure system which, incidentally, is matrilineal.

With this in mind, our plan is one of the few with a human rights-based focus that is achieved through a robust community consultation. To ensure that women’s voices are prioritized, we’ve created working groups that provide oversight to the process which includes the Ministry of Internal Affairs Gender Division, and the local NGO WUTMI (Women United Together Marshall Islands) which has over 30 years of expertise in leading women’s activism at the grassroots level. In addition, the NAP Global Network recently provided a comprehensive Gender and Human Rights Analysis. We believe these steps will ensure a gender-responsive National Adaptation Plan.

The phase that follows the development of this plan, implementation, will require steep financing that is unmanageable for developing countries such as ours. We need a step change to reach the trillions of dollars needed to protect those most vulnerable – from donor countries, MDBs, the private sector. We made progress at COP26 with the commitment to double adaptation finance. We need to acknowledge that – but also to move upwards. Even $40 billion will not meet the needs of vulnerable states.

In addition to climate change, the Marshall Islands continues to advocate for the intersections
between climate change and nuclear justice and climate change and gender based-violence and human rights. Marshall Islands, as a result of its mainstreaming efforts has also been able to successfully incorporate Gender Equality and Human Rights in its Nationally Determined Contributions Framework, a very first at global standards, and further taking our efforts to mainstream gender across sectors and particularly across our climate change agenda.

We’d like to share the achievements made with the passage of a comprehensive Gender Equality Act aligned to CEDAW, and the establishment of GBV support services and efforts to improve coordination of these services. But challenges remain when GBV is exacerbated by disaster events and the lingering gender discrimination, inequalities and inhibiting gender roles.

Women have been active in consultations to assist in relief efforts relating to impacts of climate related disaster risks. This is demonstrated through the coordination of disaster response clusters that are activated when disasters arise. These clusters include a Gender Protection and Education Cluster that provides oversight and expertise on ensuring our relief efforts are gender responsive.

Women are emerging as a major force for change. Their presence, contributions and courage, have, and still remain, critical to navigating an inclusive and sustainable recovery from the triple threat of the global pandemic, and the looming threat of the climate crisis. Yet through it all, women must be front and center in decision making and leadership. We must ensure that women and girls across the globe and in all SIDS, LDC, and frontline states are at the heart of our plans - and not only the objectives of those plans, but also involved in the process of developing them.

In closing, I underscore the importance of continued and strengthened efforts by the international community and UN system to address the unique challenges facing Small Island Developing States, particularly in relation to climate change and gender progress. SIDS can play an important role in furthering action on a wider global scale, but we are best empowered to do so only when our unique island- tailored strategies are employed.

Thank you and kommol tata