



**His Excellency Hon. Lionel Rouwen Aingimea M.P.,
President of the Republic of Nauru
United Nations General Debate of the 76th session
2021**

Mr. President,

It is an honor to address the opening of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly (albeit virtually rather than in-person once again).

On behalf of the Republic of Nauru, I would like to congratulate Your Excellency, Mr. Abdulla Shahid on your recent assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly. Let me assure you of my delegation's full cooperation and support as you steer our important work during this session. It is heartwarming to see a fellow islander take on this prestigious role, bringing our shared challenges, resilience, and the vibrancy of big ocean states to the forefront of the work of the General Assembly.

I would also like to thank His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir for his exceptional stewardship of this august body during the 75th anniversary session.

Mr. President,

This past year has truly been a turning point for the United Nations, marked by a historic anniversary and marred by disasters, conflict, and untold human suffering, all of which have been multiplied by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to overcome these adversaries, we must remain hopeful, and the hope for our shared humanity must inspire bold action.

The obstacles facing the global community now in many ways mirror the history of Nauru. We have survived epidemics that decimated our population, rebuilt and recovered from the scourge of the World Wars, overcome exploitation, and have experienced great prosperity and great loss.

Persevering through it all with the lesson that we are all deeply connected and that an outbreak in one corner of the world can produce a ripple of destruction that touches us all.

Recognizing that we are all bound together, we must all work to change course and deliver on the promise of multilateralism: an effective and robust United Nations that is fit for purpose, capable of tackling the challenges of today and the future, to build a safer, sustainable world for generations to come. A world that realizes the promise of peace, human rights and sustainable development for all and shifts away from the current trend of increasing violent conflict around the world. Previous approaches have not left the world safer, and it is time to re-commit to the vision of the 2030 Agenda.

Mr. President,

This forum, which reflects the views of every Member State, has the capability to chart our path towards a resilient, just, and equitable world. Nauru as one of the smallest member of the UN family and one of the most vulnerable, is committed to multilateralism as our only way forward together, though we must open our eyes to the reality of its current failures and act to implement our historic agreements across many issues like sustainable development, climate change, development finance, and more. The policies and plans to avert further catastrophes have been negotiated and adopted in the UN's hallow halls only to meet lackluster implementation attempts and sit idly on bookshelves and in hard drives while the world moves on and battles new crises and shocks.

As such we applaud the efforts of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres, to spearhead a revamped and reinvigorated United Nations as detailed in his report on Our Common Agenda and in principle support many of the proposals contained therewith.

Mr. President,

Inequality is growing at a rapid pace, with the pandemic deepening divisions between and within countries. Nauru is not exempt from this, and COVID-19 has only exacerbated our isolation from the global community. We have remained in a state of emergency since March 2020. The national COVID-19 Taskforce has worked tirelessly under a whole-of-government approach involving communities, the private sector, and civil society.

Through the Grace of God – we remain COVID free today. One of five countries to have this distinction.

For Nauru, and our small population of 12,000, with limited health infrastructure, our best defense against the virus is our closed borders and a capture and contain policy. However, this does not mean that we have been spared the far-reaching impacts of the pandemic. Emergency measures and costs are growing unceasingly. As a country reliant on imported goods, including produce and other foods, the challenge of supply accessibility is a stark reality.

Mr. President,

What we need to safely combat COVID-19 and begin to reopen our economy is equitable and timely access to safe, effective, and affordable vaccines. It is clear that no one is safe until we are all vaccinated everywhere. Yet, despite this knowledge access to vaccine remains elusive and uneven. We cannot afford to leave anyone behind. Therefore, we support the Secretary-General's proposal for an Emergency Platform, and a global vaccination plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a grave threat to the health systems of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). It is of the utmost importance that we can access COVID-19 prevention, mitigation, and treatment interventions; and essential, safe, affordable, effective, and quality medicines and vaccines to prevent, contain and stop transmission of the virus.

In Nauru, with the support of the COVID-19 Tools Accelerator and our development partners we have successfully vaccinated our entire adult population. Despite this achievement our island remains at risk and unable to lift emergency measures without access to vaccines for young people, twelve to eighteen. Our small population size and lack of case numbers mean we have been shut out of qualifying and accessing any additional vaccines. While we have taken the first steps to protecting our people, we cannot achieve full vaccination and effectively protect our country without the support of the international community and equitable access.

Our efforts to respond to COVID-19 and vaccinate our people would not have been possible without the valuable support provided by our partners. We are truly grateful to our genuine friends Australia, India, Japan and Republic of China (Taiwan), for their ongoing assistance.

Mr. President,

We call on the United Nations to embrace willing and able partners like Taiwan who share common global challenges, and to ensure that the people of the Republic of China (Taiwan) enjoy the same rights as the peoples of other nations. The United Nations must live up to its ideals of universality and equality, respecting the worth of every individual. Taiwan is an important partner in the global response to this pandemic, and its exemplary response to the global pandemic should not be ignored. Taiwan is ready to share their experience and aspire to do so by joining the World Health Assembly. Taiwan should have the right to participate as an equal partner in the implementation of the SDGs as they have demonstrated their ability and supported many in the SDG fields. They should also be part of “Our Common Agenda” vision.

Mr. President,

A UN 2.0 with a renewed social contract must ensure that no one is left behind, including those in SIDS and in the Pacific.

We welcome the ongoing progress of the Multi-country office in the North Pacific. The UN Resident Coordinator system provides invaluable support to our countries. The system must be backed up by predictable and adequate funding. We call on our partners to continue to support the reinvigorated resident coordinator system through more predictable sources of financing. With the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19 and the climate crisis we are in, it is even more important that we have a resident coordinator system that is well funded and fully operationalized.

Ensuring sustainable financing is critical to recovering better. Nauru, like many SIDS face barriers to sustained economic growth due to our geographic remoteness, small scale of our economy, vulnerabilities to climate change, external economic and financial shocks and the rules that govern development assistance.

For years SIDS have reiterated the limitations of the per capita income as a measure of development. This arbitrary measure does not adequately consider our special circumstances and unique vulnerabilities.

Nauru was recently reclassified as a High-Income Country – this classification for us and many island nations renders us ineligible to access concessional financing. Therefore, if structural

obstacles and our unique vulnerabilities are not considered and appropriately addressed, the goals of the SAMOA Pathway and the full achievement of the 2030 Agenda will continue to be compromised. We welcome the ongoing work on the Multi-Dimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) and reiterate the importance of its establishment, so countries like Nauru can access concessional finance. As such we welcome the Secretary-Generals proposal to find more holistic measurements and assessments of progress and development beyond GDP and will work closely to ensure that the concerns and realities of SIDS are reflected in the development of any complementary metric.

Fulfilling the financing promises made in the SAMOA Pathway, 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Paris Agreement is vital to the full and effective implementation of those historic agreements. Without adequate and predictable support from the international community Nauru and many island nations will not be able to realize the Sustainable Development Goals, nor to adapt, and mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change.

Mr. President,

We must end our war on nature and address the droughts, floods, fires, famine and more that climate change has provoked. Despite the undeniable impacts touching every corner of the world, we are faced with the harsh truth that funding for the root causes of climate change is exponentially greater than funding for our response.

Climate change is the greatest threat to our shared future, to people, the planet, peace, and prosperity.

Nauru, alongside our neighbors in the Pacific echo the alarm raised by the recent findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and its “code red for humanity”. We are undertaking ambitious actions in Nauru to address the climate crisis, but we cannot do it alone. Leaders and nations everywhere must act; and act swiftly and decisively to close the widening emissions gap and keep rising temperatures well below 1.5°C goal.

The lived realities of climate change have been with many of our countries for some time now. Climate change undermines and threatens the ability of Governments and institutions to deliver basic services such as food and water. The pandemic has met the increasing impacts of climate change and multiplied them with rising inequalities and economic regressions, the resulting

dangerous blend weakens the ability of any one Government to protect the safety and security of its citizens, risking social and political unrest. The security implications of climate change are transboundary in nature and require a multilateral response.

We will continue to advocate for a new Office for a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Climate and Security.

Climate change has crept into every facet and sector of life from the air we breathe, to the food we eat, to the homes we live in, and our response must be equally diverse and comprehensive. The United Nations and its Member States must take urgent action, protecting the security of the most vulnerable countries and communities, ensuring that our beloved green and blue planet does not turn red.

We are fast approaching COP26, and an opportunity that must be utilized to stem the current record-breaking period of extreme weather and climate disasters. We must follow the science with real effort and not empty pledges.

We call upon the G20 to phase out all fossil fuel subsidies by 2023 and accelerate actions towards transitioning to low Greenhouse Gas emission, climate-resilient economies, in line with Article (2)(1)(c) of the Paris Agreement. We also call on the G20 to take into consideration environmental and social safeguards in their energy systems to have long-term and sustainable alignment to the Paris Agreement.

We have a precious window to repair and renew our relationship with the planet and we must make these opportunities count.

Mr. President,

Nauru is a big ocean state. As people of the ocean, our lives are inextricably linked and connected to the Pacific Ocean. The ocean has shaped who we are, and our commitment to its responsible stewardship.

Nauru recognizes the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the overarching treaty governing access and use of the ocean and its resources. We have enjoyed the benefits of our large exclusive economic zone and under the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), and alongside our neighbors we have successfully managed highly migratory tuna stocks

at sustainable levels. Our strong regional cooperation has also been recognized globally as an example of best management practices of living ocean resources.

Building upon our strong regional ties Nauru was proud to host the Micronesian President's Summit just recently, which endorsed the Naoero Communiqué on strengthened cooperation on several areas related to regional security resulting from climate change and sea-level rise, transnational crime, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. We agreed to develop a subregional strategy to address these issues to ensure the continued security and safety of the Micronesian peoples into the future.

Mr. President,

We are committed to the Rule of Law in ocean affairs and to effective cooperation and implementation of UNCLOS and Nauru made a decision to invoke Section 1, Paragraph 15 of the 1994 Agreement, initiating the process to complete the Exploitation (Mining) Code within the next two years under the mandate of the International Seabed Authority (ISA). This process will allow Nauru, and other developing countries to participate in a new industry, accessing valuable resources in light of a historical context that far too often deprived developing countries from reaping the benefits.

We look forward to working closely with ISA members and observers to complete the draft Exploitation Code within two years and develop environmental regulations that help ensure any exploitation and seafloor collection operations are conducted safely and responsibly. I thank our partners who have been supporting countries like mine build their capacity in this regard.

Accessing these polymetallic nodule resources is critical to building the clean energy transition we need and towards a circular economy. These polymetallic nodules are needed to transform big and small countries energy systems and support our fight against the climate crisis.

Mr. President,

I am pleased to join this debate and the focus placed on looking forward towards a UN fit for purpose to meet the challenges that lie ahead, and with an emphasis on the youth of today and future generations.

Nauru looks toward the future with the guide of the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and our national plans. Education and capacity building remain priorities and key areas of investment to ensure that young Nauruans have a quality education accessible to all, that provides a platform for sustainable livelihoods. As such we welcome the proposal for a Transforming Education Summit in 2022 and coalition to promote and track green jobs and career paths for youth. We also welcome the establishment of the President of the General Assembly's Youth Fellowship Programme, in particular the focus on building capacity for young professionals from countries in special situations.

Mr. President,

I will conclude in hope for our ability to come together in solidarity, to overcome COVID-19, address climate change and achieve equality. 'Let's hand-in hand, shoulder-to-shoulder,' as Scripture guides us, 'walk forward to meet the challenges of tomorrow.'

Together we can deliver for we the peoples.

May God bless the Republic of Nauru and may God bless the United Nations.