



Statement of His Excellency Hersey Kyota
Ambassador of the Republic of Palau to United States of America
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Alii from the Republic of Palau, Mr. President, Madame Director-General, Members of the Executive Board, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me join the previous speakers and congratulate you, Mr. President for your election to lead the 38th Session of the General Conference.

It gives me great pleasure to address the 38th Session of the General Conference this afternoon. Sixteen years ago, I had the distinct honor and privilege to give our inaugural and acceptance address to the 30th Session of the General Conference, just a little over a month after the Republic of Palau signed the legal instruments in London to become the newest member of UNESCO on September 20, 1999. We have enjoyed and treasured our membership in this August Body in the last sixteen years and are looking forward to the next sixteen years.

In Palau, we continue to reform and improve our education system. Our culture and traditions are practiced every day at homes, in schools, workplaces and public gatherings as we strive to preserve it for generations to come. Thanks to UNESCO, Palau has received funding assistance in the areas of education, gender equality, language, cultural preservation and environmental protection.

My remarks today will focus on conservation and preservation of the environment, to which Palau places high value as they play an important role in our survival as an island country.

“Preserve the Best and Improve the Rest”, a simple phrase coined by President Remengesau in the early 1990s, which quickly became a popular slogan, synonymous with the environment and his name. From that very slogan, conservation and preservation of the environment became his passion, which led to conception of local conservation initiatives, including the Micronesia Challenge. In 2006, he issued a conservation initiative and challenged the leaders of our region to sign on to it. This initiative is now known as the Micronesia Challenge, which was designed to preserve 20 percent of our terrestrial area and 30 percent of our offshore area by year 2020. Little did we know, the Challenge inspired other regions to do the same in their areas. Under the Micronesia Challenge protected area network (PAN) were established in designated reefs and marine areas around Palau. In 2009, at the United Nations General Assembly, Palau declared its territorial water as Shark Sanctuary, becoming the first country in the world to do so.

About a year and half ago, President Remengesau took another challenge, and I am happy to report to this distinguished audience that with the help of our Congress, such a challenge has become a reality. On October 28, 2015, just a few days ago, President Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr. signed into law the Palau National Marine Sanctuary Act, creating one of the world’s largest marine sanctuaries – designating its entire ocean territory, the size of France, as a regenerative zone for sharks, whales, tuna, and countless other precious marine species. This law will protect and preserve our marine eco system and ocean life by banning commercial fishing and exports as well as deep sea mining in 80% of our exclusive economic zone. With the negative effects of climate change and decline of our fish stock, threatening our livelihood and food security, Palau saw the need to protect and preserve its oceans for the sake and future of our people. While this undertaking seems very ambitious, we need help from organizations like UNESCO and development partners to successfully implement its intended purpose. In this connection, I appeal to this great organization and development partners to assist us in this endeavor.

For thousands of years, our ancestors depended on our oceans for sustenance and survival. Today our dependent on our oceans has not changed, in fact it has expanded to include economic and recreation activities, making it more vital for our survival. But with the threat of climate change and over fishing by illegal and unlicensed fishing boats pouching in our oceans, our economic security and survival are being threatened. Many UNESCO member states, especially the SIDS, like Palau, continue to face mounting challenges in protecting their surrounding oceans and sea-based resources. This is a desperate battle with more than just an economic foundation. Our President has emphasized time and again that, “Our environment is our economy and our economy is our environment”. Every conceivable support within the reach of UNESCO and other development partners must be extended to support this critical battle to protect oceans. Knowledge sharing as well as technical support from UNESCO and donor

partners will equip us to achieve our goal to sustainably manage our oceans, which will ultimately put us in a right path to achieving oceans as a sustainable development goal. Palau's recent action to close off its EEZ to commercial fishing by establishing a Comprehensive Marine Sanctuary is a start in the right direction and we humbly welcome any support and assistance from UNESCO and member states.

In closing, through close partnerships and friendships we can all achieve our national, regional and international goals. With the Sustainable Development Goals, challenges will follow, but we need to work together to face these challenges.

On behalf of the President, the people and the government of the Republic of Palau, please accept our sincere gratitude to UNESCO and Director General, Madame Irina Bokova for her leadership, commitment and hard work to keep this great house in order. We look forward to engaging and working with you to meet our obligations to this great organization. I am confident that through our collective effort, we can save the planet, our only home. Thank you for your kind attention.