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Hon. Mr. Ruben Zachkras
Minister In Assistance to the President
Republic of the Marshall Islands

16th Conference of the Parties to the
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Cancun, Mexico
9 December 2010

Madame President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

"While the Marshall Islands understands the reluctance of some nations to fully commit to binding and definitive agreements at this time, we are also deeply concerned that if there is not a consensus to undertake serious preventative and restorative action on a global scale, time may run out."

Those are the words spoken in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit by late Marshall Islands President and Iroij His Excellency Amata Kabua. Two decades later, and today – in Cancun – time is a luxury that the most vulnerable, those at the frontline, can no longer afford to squander on impossibly grand political agendas. However imperfect the start – the international community needs to upscale action now, and to look beyond petty differences.

I can repeat all of the words that Marshallese have been saying for twenty years – that our nation is barely one meter above sea level, with no higher ground – that our nation is now facing a serious risk of losing our statehood to sea level rise. I can repeat our well-known prior positions. But you have heard these views so many times before.

But today I will do more than again repeat our urgent call – today I will tell you what is now taking place on the ground in one of the world's lowest lying nations. We are committed to implementing our national climate policy - leading towards firm action on adaptation particularly by conserving at least 30% of our near shore marine resources and 20% of our agro forestry

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resources by 2020, and to cut our own emissions – already very insignificant - by 40 percent by 2020. These are very real actions we have no choice but to carry out to give our local communities hope for a climate-resilient future. This is a future that we can only achieve through our own political commitment – coupled with the solidarity and partnership from the international community.

The Marshall Islands will be a visible test for the ultimate success – or failure – of fast start finance. In the higher politics of an important effort to boost better accounting for fast start finance, everyone seems to have lost focus of the overwhelming urgency of effective implementation, and of the need for mutual actions by donors and recipients needed to ensure results. The longer we wait – even a few years – the greater the costs and risks. It is unacceptably dangerous to delay action – not only a moral outrage, but on the cusp of a very legal wrong which will be squarely at the doorstep of the United Nations.

The Marshall Islands is already taking our own bold steps to help mobilize fast start financing – with our own Fast Start response. Our climate roadmap has laid the foundation for a national policy. Our national energy plan is the basis of our emissions commitment to cut emissions by 40% – and spells out exactly how we will achieve it.

We are not the only ones who seek to have our commitment acknowledged and fulfilled. The Republic of the Marshall Islands also strongly supports the 23 million people of Taiwan, who seek to have their own emissions actions – one of the strongest in the Asian rim – acknowledged through active observer participation in the UNFCCC.

Finally Madame President,

In the midst of what threatens to become a perpetual negotiation, we have forgotten the very foundation of the UNFCCC Convention itself – which already binds all of us to some very fundamental commitments and actions.

The international community has an inarguable responsibility to respond to the political crisis on climate with innovative solutions which build momentum through action – through defining what we can do instead of what we cannot – and to stretch our collective aspirations to ensure the survival of low-lying nations, even when present pathways are uncertain and ultimately inadequate.

It is the achievement of action by which future generations will sit in judgment of our vital conclusions.

Let me conclude by thanking you Madam President and the Government and people of Mexico for the excellent arrangement and leadership in steering these critical discussions.

Komol tata, Muchas gracias.