



REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

RURAL DEVELOPMENT - STATEMENT BY THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS, DURING THE 16th MEETING OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NEW YORK, 6 MAY 2008

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Chair,

My nation wishes to congratulate the Bureau on its election, and wishes to align itself with the statements of Grenada on behalf of AOSIS, and Tonga on behalf of the Pacific SIDS.

The rural areas of the Republic of the Marshall Islands includes our “outer islands” – an area of 28 coral atolls and 5 isolated islands – totaling 170 square kilometers of land, spread across 2 million square kilometers of ocean. The traditional way of life in these “outer island” communities is an important foundation of our national cultural identity.

However, decreasing opportunities are drawing away many of our outer islands populations into our cities. Built upon scarce land, our urban areas often struggle to provide the infrastructure to meet the needs of rising populations. While this trend of “urban drift” is a global issue, its impacts are amplified in a small island developing state, where land and traditional culture serve as our deepest self-definition.

The lack of affordable and reliable energy, as well as the lack of transportation between our outer islands, is a serious impairment to developing trade, improving modern education and providing more effective health services in our rural areas.

Yet reversing these trends in our rural areas is very much an achievable reality. Indeed, the effective management of our rural areas will provide a key opportunity for our nation’s future economic growth.

Chair,

We are proud of our commitment to the Micronesia Challenge, a western Pacific intergovernmental conservation program with the shared goals of conserving 30 percent of our coastal waters, and 20 percent of our land, by the year 2020. By working with local leaders in rural communities to preserve their most important areas, we will ensure that future visitors will also be able to experience the same unique ecological and visual character of our rural communities. Sustainable tourism made possible by this conservation initiative will also provide an important incentive to retain – and grow - rural communities.

Investment in our outer island communities, including donor assistance, helps to reduce urban stress, and results in multiple benefits for traditional culture, ecology as well as the growth of sustainable tourism. Investment and aid in our outer islands has a very positive “rate of return” for donors and investors. We encourage donor participation in projects such as our outer island renewable energy initiative, as well as in helping to build our transportation infrastructure, both of which help to grow the benefits of rural settlement.

Chair,

Projects which increase the access to modern education in rural areas are another means of wise investment. We embrace participation in donor-assisted education aid programs for our outer islands, including the participation of foreign volunteer teachers.

Chair,

Our rural communities depend closely upon subsistence fishing for their food security and survival. We also call upon member states to realize the negative impacts of commercial fishing practices, which result in increasing by-catch and discards of fish species which important to these traditional communities.