



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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Palau Country Statement

Steven Victor

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment

ESCAP 79th Session: Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for Sustainable Development in Palau.

Excellencies, development partners, ladies and gentlemen. Alii! I bring greetings from Palau. I am honored to address this distinguished gathering and to share perspectives from Palau towards Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development.

Climate vulnerabilities

I hope that at this point in time, we can now all accept that climate change is happening as we speak and fully recognize the position of small island states at the forefront of this crisis. This climate crisis is rapidly turning into a humanitarian crisis. In Palau, extreme storms continue to destroy crops, homes, and critical infrastructure. Sea-level rise is persistently eroding away our coastlines and inundating our low-lying croplands. Droughts have caused water shortages that impact daily living. Increasing sea-surface temperatures and acidity are impacting our reefs that are essential for food security and the main attractions of our marine-based economy.

Sustainable development

Palau is a small island state in the Western Pacific. We are one of the smallest countries in the world with a population of about 20,000 people, but we are a large ocean state with over 350 islands and an EEZ that is roughly the size of France. The main engines of our economy are marine-based tourism and fisheries. The reality is that as SIDS, we face significant hurdles to economic growth because of our small sizes and populations and our distance from major markets.

The COVID pandemic and the associated disruption to global travel drove our tourism industry to a standstill. While the recovery and growth beyond pre-

pandemic levels is anticipated to be slow, it presents an opportunity to re-think and redefine growth within our island context...growth that is inclusive, reflects the development aspirations of our people, translates to better quality of life, and aligns meaningfully to our shared global development goals.

Balancing growth and climate actions

My Ministry is mandated to protect, manage, and promote the sustainable use of land and marine resources for the benefit of the Palauan people. Seeking to balance protection with the sustainable use of resources to build bluer/greener economies is at the crux of this very expansive mandate.

Fisheries, aquaculture, and oceans are critical to food security. Palau and its neighbors are ocean-based economies, as well as ocean-based cultures. Climate change hurts the core of our identity. Threats to fisheries are a threat to global food security. Palau is urgently calling on providers of climate finance to mobilize and scale up investments in strengthened sustainable fisheries as adaptation measures to climate change.

Palau needs transformed climate financing to support transformed food systems. Adaptation financing must be as expansive as climate threats are – and include the full spectrum of our human existence. Commercialization and stronger market connections will drive increased production of resilient harvests by diverse and socially inclusive small-scale producers. “Market-based” solutions must be considered valid adaptations.

Finally, Excellencies, Palauan people, culture and livelihoods are inseparable from the Land and Ocean around us. This intimate link between people and nature was at the heart of island culture and remains so even today, despite increasing globalization. The triple threat of Climate Change, COVID, and global Conflict has demonstrated our vulnerabilities as island communities and reminded us that the resilience of our people depends on the resilience of our land and sea. And inaction is NOT an option.

Thank you.

Honorable Steven Victor
Minister, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment
Republic of Palau



Steven Victor is a Palauan native who became the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment for the Republic of Palau in July 2021. He is a marine biologist by training and an avid gardener at heart. He has served the environment and conservation sector in Palau and the Micronesia region for more than 20 years.

Mr. Victor served as the Head of the Research Department at the Palau International Coral Reef Center from 2003 to 2009, during which he concurrently served as an adjunct Instructor at the Palau Community College. In 2009, Mr. Victor took a post with The Nature Conservancy--Micronesia Program as a Conservation Planner and by 2021 had advanced to the role of Director.

Mr. Victor has managed regional projects in Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. He has taken a leading role in facilitating the convergence of scientists, conservation practitioners, managers, and resource users to address issues in areas such as data-poor small scale fisheries, marine protected areas network design, management effectiveness evaluations, tuna fisheries reform, and securing livelihood opportunities. He is a strong advocate of the role of robust science in achieving win-win strategies for people and nature.

Mr. Victor has a Master's Degree in Biology from the University and Guam and a post-graduate certificate from the Cambridge Judge Business School.