

**Statement of President Hilda C. Heine**  
**before the Nitijela (Parliament) of the Marshall Islands**  
**46<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Regular Session**  
**Part II**  
**[ENGLISH VERSION]**  
**August 4, 2025**

Iokwe and a very warm greeting to everyone, those gathered here this morning in this the highest of law-making bodies of the Marshallese people, and those listening in from around our nation, and around the world.

At the outset, we offer our deepest gratitude and praise to our Father Almighty, whose divine protection has sustained the Marshallese people and our island nation. May His continued blessings guide us as we endeavor to build a brighter, more hopeful future for generations to come.

I wish to pay my respect to our Traditional Leaders – the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council of Irooj, and the other Traditional Leaders and the Owner with the Council of Irooj, and their spouses. A special recognition to Lerooj Esther Zedkaia and the Traditional Leaders of Majuro Atoll.

I would also like to acknowledge Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice-Speaker, Cabinet Ministers, Senators, and spouses.

I wish to take this moment to recognize the Nitijela Chaplain and the many Church Leaders across our congregations, and their spouses.

I acknowledge with respect our Chief Justice and the members of the Judiciary serving across our nation.

I likewise recognize the Mayor of Majuro, Officers of the Marshall Islands Mayors Association, and all Mayors from our respective local governments.

I commend the Chief Secretary, the Acting PSC Chairperson and Commissioners, along with the Secretaries and Heads of Departments, Agencies and Offices, and all Government employees.

I extend my respect to the Ambassadors of our diplomatic partners – Taiwan, the United States, Australia, and Japan – and to all who have meaningfully supported our Government, including our steadfast partners from the US Garrison at Kwajalein Atoll.

Lastly, I wish to recognize and thank the members of the private sector and NGOs for their invaluable contributions to our nation's growth and development.

I am pleased and honored that I can deliver my remarks before this Nitijela and the Marshallese people at this Second-half of the 46<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Regular Session of parliament.

The Marshall Islands are at a crossroads. Decisions made in the capitals of larger countries affect our every day lives, and we have little to no influence on them. Despite this fact, or perhaps because of it, we must engage fully in the many multilateral platforms available to us to ensure our interests are heard.

From time to time, we question why our officials attend many of these meetings. Indeed, we question the value of our participation in these meetings.

Last week people around the world, and around the Pacific, including the Marshall Islands, celebrated the unprecedented advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in a case spearheaded by Vanuatu. The highest international court in the world provided a comprehensive and detailed ruling that confirms that the RMI has the law firmly on our side as we confront the climate crisis.

It affirms our continued sovereignty in the face of sea level rise, vindicates our commitment to multilateralism, and establishes that the 1.5 degrees limit that we fought for and won in the Paris Agreement is legally binding. It affirms our efforts in international negotiations and strengthens pathways for securing climate justice, holding all States accountable under international law.

I wish to recognize the important role the young legal students at the Emalus Campus of USP played in instigating this bold strategy to pursue climate justice at the ICJ. This group of courageous students included Atina Shultz, a student from the

Marshall Islands. It is this kind of leadership, determination and courage that gives me faith that Marshallese will confront and overcome the climate impacts we face.

I also wish to extend words of appreciation and gratitude to our Foreign Minister and the Minister responsible for Environment for their leadership role, as well as those of our ambassadors and staff at our Missions in New York and Geneva, including our Climate Envoys, legal counsels and advisors, for their dedication and commitment. I wish to single out the team that presented our oral argument before the ICJ, Ambassador John Silk, Deputy Attorney General Jonathen Kawakami, and Climate Envoy Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner.

Another recent international achievement took place in May at the 79<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly (WHA) where the Marshall Islands and other Pacific countries joined with Latin American countries to push for the approval of a resolution “mandating the World Health Organization (WHO) to update its reports on the health and environmental effects of nuclear weapons.

On behalf of all Marshallese, I wish to thank the Minister of Health and his team, including our Ambassadors and staff at our Geneva and UN Mission, including envoy for nuclear and human rights, for their dedication and for continuing to fight to safeguard our rights as a people.

The success stories I have shared demonstrate my government’s commitment to bring attention to the health and environmental problems resulting from the nuclear

testing and from climate change. They also validate why it is imperative that our nation is represented at these international meetings.

Turning to our Pacific region, Mr. Speaker, I believe strongly that the Marshall Islands must fully participate in all regional organizations. Last month, the Republic of the Marshall Islands had the honor of hosting several regional and subregional gatherings including the Vaka Pacific Education Conference, the Micronesian Shipping Commission, and the Micronesian Islands Forum. These meetings served to deepen our bonds with Pacific Island neighbors, foster mutual learning, and advance collaboration in addressing the shared challenges we face across the region. Regionalism provides a platform to work cooperatively with member countries to amplify our common goals at the international level, which is often difficult for small island countries to accomplish on our own.

Mr. Speaker, in last week's paper we saw an opinion piece from the First Secretary of the Tuvalu High Commission in Wellington, New Zealand, regarding Taiwan's participation in the upcoming Forum meeting in the Solomon Islands. The author concluded that there should not be any debate on the issue since Taiwan has been a Forum development partner since 1993. This position has been echoed by the President of Palau on numerous occasions.

Mr. Speaker, I believe firmly that the Forum belongs to its members, not countries that are non-members. And non-members should not be allowed to dictate how our premier regional organization conducts its business.

We witnessed at the Forum in Tonga how China, a world superpower, interfered to change the language of the Forum Communique, the communiqué of our Pacific Leaders. This is a practice my government will never tolerate. If the practice of interference in the affairs of the Forum becomes the norm, then I question our nation's membership in the organization.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, there is an ongoing review of the regional architecture of the Forum and other CROP agencies such as SPC, SPREP, FFA, to ensure that their deliverables are on target, and inter-agency conflicts are minimized. In the current review, it is critical that the question of Taiwan's participation in Forum meetings is settled once and for all to safeguard equity and sovereignty of member governments. I am very pleased that our Minister of Education sits on the High-Level Panel undertaking the review representing the Micronesia subregion.

Mr. Speaker, as we monitor international and regional trends and events to maintain and preserve the rights and interests of our citizens, my administration will continue to work diligently to complete the programs under its' Agenda 2030. In fact, the Cabinet held a two-day retreat last week to review the Agenda 2030 work-program to guarantee on-time delivery and make adjustments that may be necessary.

Ministers will provide detailed reports to Nitijela in the coming days and weeks, but I am pleased to note here that since taking office 18 months ago, this administration has been able to complete close to 50 percent of the goals and targets under Agenda 2030.

We are grateful to have accomplished key milestones including a new Dialysis Center, which is now complete; our Monetary Authority is now established (I extend my appreciation to the Ministers of Finance and Foreign Affairs, the Envoy for Compact Implementation, their respective teams, and the leadership of the END-designated atolls for their contributions as the program enters its final review phase ahead of implementation); the ENRA program will commence later in the year; the new Majuro terminal is about to start pending resolution of bond requirements; final review of bids for the construction of the new Capital Complex is underway; a new passport and immigration office is almost completed to better serve more of our people; and finally, the social support scheme for people with disabilities will commence on October 1 of this year. For these many accomplishments, we remain hopeful and give thanks to God for his continued blessings upon our Republic.

Now is the time for our Government to press forward in advancing plans that will benefit the Marshallese people. Many of these objectives are reflected in the upcoming budget, scheduled for presentation to Nitijela in the weeks ahead. Among the new initiatives are the following:

1. In line with last year's commitment, we will increase the minimum wage for the lowest-paid workers by 50 cents, bringing the hourly rate to \$4.50 starting October 1st.
2. The morning healthy snack initiative for students is now ready for rollout. The proposal, funded through the Ministry of Health's supplemental budget, has officially come into effect. The program will distribute fruits, vegetables, and nutritious beverages including milk, juice, and coconut water to support augment students' health. While a full breakfast cannot be provided at this

time, I believe these snacks will give our children the strength and nutrition they need to start their day.

3. An agreement has been finalized with the Bank of Guam to allocate \$10 million to MIDB in support of Marshallese businesses seeking to expand and strengthen their operations including in sectors such as hospitality, construction, and beyond. The terms of this funding arrangement are favorable and promise substantial benefits for our local enterprises.

4. Draft legislation establishing a Taxation Regime to resolve persistent tax-related issues and bolster government revenues through increased tariffs is set for presentation to the Nitijela, following a series of consultations with the private sector.

5. Negotiations are underway to finalize a World Bank loan for the construction of two new hospitals – one in Majuro and another in Ebeye. We anticipate signing the agreement during the upcoming Pacific Islands Forum in the Solomon Islands. The arrangement is designed to unlock vital resources for development, while allowing minimal annual repayments from the Government, sourced from returns under the Compact's newly established fund.

6. I understand that the lease to build the new Police headquarters including a jail facility is now complete, and construction is finally set to begin. What was once a long-standing goal is now set to take shape. I would like to thank the Minister of Justice and his team for their efforts in driving this initiative forward and bringing the lease to resolution.

7. It is our vision and expectation that the Marshall Islands Embassy in the United Arab Emirates will open before December.

8. An agreement with the PII is being finalized to enable paving of outer island runways; we look forward to seeing 3-4 runways completed each year. Priorities will be given to runways generating more revenues for AMI.

9. Lastly, discussions are currently underway with Fiji Airways regarding the establishment of a flight route linking Fiji and Majuro with onward travel to Honolulu. This initiative represents a significant stride toward enhancing regional air connectivity.

Mr. Speaker, in all these projects we express our deep appreciation to landowners whose lands these projects will be built. The leadership of the Minister of Internal Affairs and his team who work to secure appropriate land leases is appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, while we recognize and commend the growing number of conviction rates by the Attorney General's office, and more individuals who are actively reporting violations of our laws, we must also acknowledge that certain incidents continue to occur – incidents that pose a serious threat to the integrity of our Government, the stability of our nation, and the well-being of our families.

We will talk about pressing issues such as corruption and other matters in the coming days, but today I'd like to focus on a pressing concern facing our younger generations, which has come to light. Recent studies confirm a fivefold increase in alcohol use, drug consumption, and smoking among girls and boys since 2020.

Simultaneously, rates of teenage pregnancy in the Marshall Islands have climbed to the highest levels in the Pacific region when compared with our neighboring countries. Compounding these concerns, youth health continues to decline as many are overwhelmed by responsibilities beyond their capacity, leading to increased rates of depression and suicidal thoughts.

The Government calls on every parent to pause and truly consider the struggles facing our youth today. Likewise, we invite our Churches to help instill in our children a sense of duty and belonging within their families, and to remind them that life is not solely for oneself.

The Government, under the leadership of the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs and the Envoy for women, youth, and children, is committed to doing its part, but it is incumbent upon our entire community to invest time in our children and truly understand what drives them toward substance abuse and starting families early. Many are simply not ready for such responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, despite challenges before us, we must pause to express heartfelt gratitude to the individuals who proudly represented their families and our nation. Last month, 55 Marshallese athletes competed in the Pacific Mini Games held in Palau. Of these, nine reached the final rounds and collectively brought home twelve medals for the Republic of the Marshall Islands. We are immensely proud of these young athletes and wish to recognize their achievements especially our medal winners: 1. Kiaben Kennedy, 2. Idor Zytea Harris Jr., 3. Neal Hicking, 4. Zyra Nemana Harris, 5. Olivia Reed, 6. Jordan Lemae, 7. Sydel Ma'alei Ajen, 8. Merean Atantaake, and 9. William Reed. Notably, 16-year-old Zyra Nemana Harris was

honored with the Best Outstanding Female Junior Athlete Award. Let us all extend our applause to these outstanding athlete. I also would like to recognize and thank the President of MINOC, Minister Muller, the Chef de Mission, Bobby Zed, their coaches, and all those who contributed to Team RMI's success.

In pursuit of deepening youth engagement and cultivating a more vibrant sporting culture, the Government is moving to introduce legislation that will enable monetary awards for athletes who demonstrate exceptional performance. This initiative stands as a meaningful acknowledgment of the dedication, resilience, and hard-earned success required to secure medals – whether on home soil, across the region, or beyond.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to take this opportunity to humbly encourage every individual that will be benefiting from the ENRA program and related initiatives to approach this opportunity with thoughtful responsibility. These resources are intended not only to ease immediate burdens but to uplift the standard of living for every family. Amidst rising costs in our islands, let us invest in what matters most – ensuring our students thrive in school, our elders are well supported, and our families enjoy healthier meals and improved living environments.

With these words, may God bless all of us and may God bless our beloved island nation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.