

**H.E. Dr. Hilda Heine**  
**President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands**  
**80th Session - General Assembly**  
**General Debate**  
**United Nations. New York**  
**24 September 2025**

*check against delivery*

Madame President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellences,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands has a unique legacy with the United Nations which reaches back to the creation of this organization, 80 years ago. As a Strategic UN Trusteeship, it was the UN flag which flew first over our islands and it inspired us to define our nation and speak up when we saw injustice.

The UN was founded on a commitment to never again tolerate aggression, to avoid the very kind of geopolitical tension or even future open conflict between superpowers now openly foretold today, in my own Pacific Islands region and far beyond. At a time when international cooperation is in dire need, the very foundations of global order are now more uncertain than ever.

My low-lying atoll nation bears witness to the sharpest edge of climate change, which the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders have consistently defined as the region's number one security threat. The scale of impact - and the future of our youngest generations - depends on whether global powers are working together.

If I could find a louder alarm for the Pacific Islands than my words today, I would sound it. There is still time for action, but only urgent action - at scale - can reduce vulnerability across all key sectors, and to strengthen the free and democratic nations which define our island region.

We need the world to better understand that our security is linked to our fragility, cutting across key indicators. We worry our institutions will not easily withstand future threats - whether if by rising seas or geopolitical competition.

Madame President,

During our decades as a UN Strategic Trusteeship administered by the United States, the UN Trusteeship Council remained an early and important platform for our voices, and to tell the world where right lay from wrong. But it fell short of its mandate - today, our nation bears the legacy of 67 atmospheric nuclear tests between 1946 and 1958,

which pose profound contemporary challenges. And while we acknowledge important actions by the former administering authority, the US, significant disagreement remains, including ultimate responsibility for what remains today. Our communities seek justice, a clean environment and safe return to their homes.

Our Marshallese pleas to the Trusteeship Council to stop nuclear testing were disregarded with assurances of our well-being, with two resolutions assuring our well-being, in 1954 and 1956, remain the only instance in which a UN organ has ever so explicitly allowed nuclear detonations. And the eventual result was a legacy burden of nuclear risk and exposure which has persisted for generations of human rights, environmental and health challenges, as addressed by UN Human Rights Council resolution 57/26 and reported on by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Special Rapporteurs on Toxics, and Internally Displaced Persons.

Today - the difficult lessons of our past should help drive international efforts to curb and end nuclear threats through any effective means. Rising global tension has only heightened nuclear risk. The Marshall Islands has recently become a signatory to the Rarotonga South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone treaty, and we also look forward to completing timely ratification.

It does not escape attention that the Trusteeship Council is due to meet this December. 79 years after the first nuclear test was conducted in my country in 1946, the UN should now be capable of delivering a contemporary acknowledgment and apology for what took place in its name and under its flag, and for not hearing the voice of our people when we told this body to stop. Perhaps after 34 years since our admission as a member of this body in 1991, the appropriate UN organs can help to bring healing and closure over decisions which never should have been made.

Madame. President,

The positive momentum from this year's Third UN Oceans Meeting in Nice will be needed to demand a reordering of short-term plunder against longer-term benefit.

The Marshall Islands stands firmly committed to safeguarding the health of our oceans, which are central to the livelihoods of our people. As a small island - and large ocean - nation, we are acutely aware of the threats posed by overfishing, unsustainable marine resource exploitation, and the escalating impacts of climate change.

Our efforts are grounded in a vision of a healthy, resilient ocean ecosystem which supports both ecological integrity and economic prosperity. As stewards of the Pacific Ocean, we urge the international community to take bold action to scale up efforts in addressing marine pollution, ocean acidification, and supporting small island developing states in strengthening our management capacity.

The Marshall Islands joins 37 other nations who have already expressed their support for a moratorium on seabed mining in the high seas - until there is a code with

adequate safeguards and until we have a close understanding of impacts and biodiversity at stake. More political will is needed to break through a mentality of 'drill first, ask later,' before even assessing what is at stake, including the impacts on fisheries and marine food chains. We have enacted our own national ban on deep seabed mining permits, and as we move to document and manage seamount biodiversity within our EEZ, to our immediate north, high seas mining exploration threatens to expand into exploitation. As important an opportunity as seabed mining may become, it cannot be at the irreversible expense of our Pacific waters and vast fisheries.

The Marshall Islands welcomes this week's achievement of entry into force of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction agreement early next year, and looks forward building a robust early architecture.

Madame President,

This year is the 10th Anniversary of the Paris Agreement, and the creation of the High Ambition Coalition, which helped deliver the Agreement's 1.5°C warming limit. A decade on, we stand on the verge of that threshold.

The International Court of Justice has confirmed that international law demands action from all nations, whether signatories to the Paris Agreement or not. Its ruling was clear: there are binding obligations to prevent exactly the type of significant harm that we see today, and that will only worsen as temperatures rise.

The vast majority of countries are failing to meet their obligations. The International Court of Justice has now stated that international law demands action and stringent due diligence from all - that there are binding obligations to prevent exactly the type of significant harm which we face. The ICJ also confirmed what the Pacific has always said: once established, our maritime zones are fixed, and that our statehood will persist, even as sea levels rise.

Every country should have submitted its new climate target by February, so that by now we would have a clear picture of what we must do to keep 1.5°C alive. Only 15 countries, including the Marshall Islands, did so by February, and only 32 have done so now. These plans must set out how countries will end the reliance on fossil fuels that holds our future hostage, and replace them with the renewables that are better for our health, our economies, and our future.

To thrive, we need billions in climate finance, particularly for adaptation and loss and damage. We've heard the promises - but promises don't reclaim land in atoll nations like mine. They don't develop mangrove defenses, shore up our hospitals and schools against rising seas, or preserve cultures deeply tied to land that is slipping under waves. Those things require money. It is past time for the rich world to meet its obligations and get money to where it's needed most.

As we approach COP30, we need all nations to deliver on promises to respond to the climate catastrophe. We must close the trillion dollar climate finance gap, particularly for adaptation. We must deliver stronger plans which show how we'll end fossil fuels and halve global emissions in this decade.

Madame President,,

Our sharp challenges are far-ranging. Together with Pacific island neighbors, we face one of the world's highest burdens of non-communicable disease. Diabetes, heart disease, and other NCDs are now leading causes of premature death, straining our health systems and undermining economic resilience. This crisis reflects both global inequities and local challenges, and it underscores the need for island-driven partnerships at scale—so that our people can achieve basic human rights to to dignity and healthcare.

Madame President,

As a small nation, events a half a world away are increasingly relevant upon our own shores.

Starting with the 2014 occupation of Crimea, Russian aggression in Ukraine has lacked any basis in international law, and has pushed the world deeper into global tension. Accountability must be applied to all, and while strong leadership is needed to help fairly resolve and address this difficult crisis, it must also closely and directly involve Ukraine itself. And while the Pacific Islands are halfway across the world, we should have a very direct interest how small and vulnerable democracies are treated in the footsteps of larger powers.

Madame President,

A more effective UN Security Council is needed to meet modern challenges. The Marshall Islands considers Japan and India, among others, to meet objective consideration as permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Madame President,

The island nation of Taiwan has been repeatedly excluded from important international engagements throughout the UN system, despite its role as an important partner to the Marshall Islands and the world in the SDGs, in technical cooperation, and promoting regional peace.

UNGA Resolution 2758 has been repeatedly and falsely portrayed as consensus on a One China “UN law”. Never has there been such gaslighting in this institution. While this resolution does address who sits behind a nameplate at the UN, it does not confer

or justify any basis for coercion or seizing sovereign control of an independent democratic nation.

The UN Secretariat should further end discriminatory practices against Taiwanese passport holders, including journalists - and all member states should understand that these, and other politically influenced practices where Resolution 2758 is misrepresented, will never be justification under international law for military invasion or coercive acts against Taiwan.

Madame President,

In 1961, United States President John F. Kennedy addressed this hall, and said of the UN that “either it will grow to meet the challenges of our age, or it will be gone with the wind, without influence, without force, without respect.” He described the UN as two forces: “one is composed of those who are trying to build the kind of world described in Articles I and II of the Charter. The other, seeking a far different world, would undermine this organization in the process.”

Madame. President,

The threat of nuclear war that confronted the world in 1961 remains today- though now at an even greater scale. When President Kennedy spoke in 1961, climate change wasn't as widely understood. Today, we are confronted with a range of deep risks, any one of which does not bode well for the future of this world, let alone taken together. The hope for our youngest and future generations is in the profound vision of nations committed to peace and multilateralism.

Thank you and kम्मol tata.