

Statement by
H.E. Masao Nakayama
Permanent Representative of the Federated States of Micronesia
to the United Nations

at the
World Summit on Food Security
Rome, 16-18 November 2009

Check Against Delivery

Mr Chairman, I want to start by first commending the Director General of the FAO for his leadership on this issue and convening this critically important summit on food security. We are going to need strong leadership today and in the years to come to solve chronic world hunger and ensure that all people have sufficient food to meet their basic nutritional needs. We must make the right to food a reality for all.

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Federated States of Micronesia. We are a small island nation with significant food security issues and we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this discussion.

One of the challenges in responding to the global food crisis is addressing the various needs of different regions. In the Federated States of Micronesia while we were once able to provide for our own means of subsistence, today, like many island nations, our food security is dependent on international trade and imported food products. There are several issues with our reliance on imported food products that impact on our food security.

First, regrettably, a lot of the food we import has poor nutritional value. This has resulted in malnutrition and significant health problems for our people. The impacts of these poor nutritional choices affect a significant percentage of our population.

Secondly, on the production side, for many years imported food has been cheaper or more convenient to prepare and use than domestically

produced traditional and introduced food items. Without sufficient incentives to grow and market traditional food items our systems of traditional production and distribution have been weakened.

Thirdly, the small size of our markets and distance from international production centres makes us extremely vulnerable to increases in global food and transport prices. For a fragile economy such as ours, the rise in fuel cost affects both the price of imported food and local food.

There are of course many domestic policies that we can, and are implementing to reduce our reliance on imported food and revive traditional systems of sustainable food cultivation. Yet, there are many difficulties to overcome. For example, storage of local food is difficult, as like most Pacific Island governments and communities we do not have the technology, facilities, and financial capability to preserve and store these crops easily. Additionally, the cost and lack of internal transport hinders our ability to move local food crops from areas of abundance to areas of need.

To revive and imbed these systems will require not only time and resources, but access to improved planting materials, and education of consumers. We are investing in all of this. The Micronesian Government is committed to restore traditional food crops and production systems to their vitality and role in preserving the health and security of the community. While much has changed that simply cannot be reinstated, we know that we can improve our relative food security to acceptable levels. But we cannot do it alone as our current institutional and financial capacity is limited. We ask that outside nations and international institutions continue to help us in the necessary process of investing in our agricultural and distribution systems.

The most fundamental challenge to our food security however, is climate change. We meet today to discuss world hunger less than a month before the UNFCCC negotiations in Copenhagen are to commence. We cannot underestimate the importance of a global agreement to protect the climate for food security.

As a small island developing state we are one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the impacts of climate change. We are already experiencing the impacts of climate change on food security in our

islands. Our crops are being damaged by salt-water intrusion from rising sea-levels. Our taro gardens in particular, have suffered extensive damage, thus reducing the supply of one of our traditional and staple food items. We have also seen saltwater intrusion stunt and undermine our coconut tress that have for generations been a source of nourishment for our people. Arable lands on our atoll islands are affected by coastal erosions. A major threat to food security on these islands is the rise of the water lens, which will bring the saltwater beneath it in touch with plant roots.

Ocean acidification is also a grave threat to our food security. As the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere increases, more CO₂ is being absorbed by the oceans. This increases the acidity of the oceans and impedes the ability of coral to grow with negative impacts on dependent species and fisheries. As a nation that relies on marine food sources for much of our protein intake, this is a particularly serious threat to our food security. Of course, ocean acidification will have serious effects on the food security of many small island developing states that rely on marine resources for their food supply.

Without deep emission cuts, the prospect for the future is particularly alarming. Elsewhere in the Pacific, some atoll islands have already being evacuated because they no longer produce sufficient food to support their inhabitants due to crop damage from seawater. This fate also threatens Micronesia. The inability of our ancestral island homelands to provide for the basic means of subsistence of our people is one of the gravest security threats we face from the climate change. Without access to food, people will be forced to migrate.

There is no doubt that to eradicate world hunger, we must solve the climate crisis. We must keep global temperature rise as far below 1.5 degrees Celsius as possible. Even this will not guarantee the survival of all coral reefs, eliminate sea-level rise, nor prevent the threat of climate change on food production, as we have already seen today even at a less than 1 degree warming over pre-industrial level.

Of course, the people in Micronesia, and other small island developing states are not the only people that will be severely affected by the impacts of climate change on food security. The effects of climate change on

agricultural production threaten to increase the number of people exposed to chronic hunger by several million.

We can prevent such a tragedy. We meet today when we still have the time. An ambitious, comprehensive and legally binding agreement in Copenhagen is a necessary step to responding to the global food crisis.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, food security, especially on small islands, is already under threat now from the adverse effects of climate change, even as a consequence of a less than 1 degree warming over pre-industrial level. From this vantage point, it does not take much imagination to picture what would happen when global warming increases to the 2 degree limit that developed countries seem to set for themselves and as good enough for the rest of the world.

Thank you.