

Hon.Ota Kisino
Republic of the Marshall Islands

Statement by

His Excellency Ota Kisino

Minister for Culture and Internal Affairs for Marshall Islands

on the occasion of the 43rd Session of the FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023)

Excellencies

Fellow Member States

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Marshall Islands experience severe droughts in the last few years and with increasing sea level rise the freshwater supply is dwindling. United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has reported that the 34 islands that comprise the country are in danger of being inundated by rising sea levels and dwindling freshwater supplies. This signals a major challenge to agriculture development to develop water management strategies for producing crops in the face of this potential crisis.

Iakwe from the Republic of the Marshall Islands. On behalf of the People and Government of the Marshall Islands, I thank FAO for brining us together for the importance conference. It is an honor for the Marshall Islands to be able to participate in this event and to convey our message on the importance of our food system and challenges.

Food security underpins all other development. We tend to prioritize food and sustaining our own lives and our families over other responsibilities. The continued high food prices today has called into question our heavy reliance on the global food market. An estimated 80 to 90 percent of the food we consume is imported.

And in recognizing our persistent and large trade deficit and limited capacity for foreign exchange earnings, this implies a high degree of vulnerability in our nation's food security.

Given our limited resources for international trade, balance of payments constraints, and recurrent emergencies, increasing and stabilizing domestic food production is considered to be essential for a resilient food secure Marshall Islands.

Furthermore, there is growing and compelling evidence that Marshallese of all incomes experience chronic health problems and sometimes premature death due to poor quality diet, less than optimal nutrition, and occasional exposure to unsafe food. Nutrition problems are often linked to the types of food eaten which is influenced not only by personal choices, but also by cost, ease of preparation, availability and accessibility.

Increased production, processing and preservation of local nutritious foods and strengthened local markets are therefore important strategies to pursue, together with effective education, communication and outreach programs.

The stability of our food supply at the national level is dependent on the resilience of the food supply system to shocks such as food price spikes, climatic disasters, outbreaks of pest/ diseases, and also to longer-term trends – including downturns in the global economy, changing climatic conditions and labor migration from rural areas.

Currently, security of our food supply is heavily dependent on our ability to pay for food imports and on reliable shipping services both to the RMI and within our islands group; hence the need for increasing local food production and ensuring an efficient national food distribution system.

Improvements in food and nutrition security will involve both economic adjustments and behavioral changes. Such long-term processes will need a consolidated approach from a range of government institutions working together with traditional leaders, local government, community-based organizations, the private sector, donors and development partners.

Enhancing our food system is not a single agency task, but rather a collective and shared responsibility and we recognize that without a proactive response to the food systems challenges we face, our long-term development and progress towards achieving the SDGs will be undermined.

Kommol tata and Thank you.