



REPUBLIC OF NAURU

COUNTRY STATEMENT

Pacific Regional Consultation on Internal Displacement

Excellencies and Colleagues

I would like to thank the IOM and GIZ for organizing this meeting.

Responding to the negative impacts of climate change is a central component of Nauru's National Sustainable Development Strategy. Nauru sits just below the equator, so cyclones are not a significant risk. However, sea level rise poses a very serious threat to housing and critical infrastructure, the vast majority of which is located along our low-lying coast.

In response, we have launched the Higher Ground Initiative - a massive, multi-generational project to develop the higher elevation interior of our island. New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research is helping us assess the risk posed to coastal areas by sea level rise, which will inform our planning for Higher Ground. The work will be coordinated by a Steering Committee comprised of officials from all relevant Ministries. In this sense, you could say that internal migration is one of the top national priorities of the Government of Nauru.

However, as with all our sustainable development priorities, *the greatest challenge is finance*. We have acquired a library of great planning documents, but it is very difficult to find the resources for implementation, which leaves us in a persistent and externally-imposed state of high risk.

With this national context as background, I would like to make a few points with regard to the matter before us.

First, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change should frame all of our discussions on climate-induced migration, under which developed countries are obligated to assist vulnerable countries respond to the negative impacts of climate change. This obligation is rooted in their historical responsibility as the largest polluters, as well as their high respective capability as wealthy nations. In my many years of following international discussions on climate change, I have seen tremendous political will in developing countries to take ambitious action. The lack of political will typically resides with our development partners, who have increasingly shifted their responsibility to provide finance onto the private sector and to developing countries themselves.

Therefore, the second point I would like to make is that the technical work conducted under this initiative should always relate back to the central political challenge of making finance available to vulnerable developing countries for implementation. We have seen how quickly trillions of dollars can be mobilized by developed country governments and central banks to save their economies during a pandemic, but vulnerable countries must haggle with development banks for years just to get a small project funded. Nauru, of course, is grateful for the funding we do receive for critical development projects, but we should also recognize that we have been talking about building our resilience to climate change for nearly thirty years, and I cannot say that our security over this time has

significantly improved. The value of this initiative would increase dramatically if it equips us with accurate cost estimates for implementing resilience measures, which can form the basis of fundable project proposals that enjoy the support of our development partners.

Third. The challenge of managing internal migration cannot be divorced from the broader challenge of sustainable development. Safe and humane migration is only possible when the receiving community has adequate housing and infrastructure to absorb the new migrants. This is not currently the case in my country, where overcrowding is a huge problem, and our water and waste systems are severely overburdened. Creating silos for discrete issues can lead to projects and plans that are disconnected from a country's broader development vision, as well as divert human capacity and resources away from other urgent priorities. It can also lead to competition over smaller and smaller pots of money, which rarely have a transformative impact. Funding institutions like the Green Climate Fund are moving towards programmatic approaches for responding to climate change, and I would hope that work under this initiative can feed into that trend.

Lastly, I must emphasize that our first priority as Governments should be to help people stay in their homes and in their communities. Nauru has serious concerns that, rather than being a last resort, the relocation of people could become the preferred option for dealing with the climate crisis because it is cheaper for the biggest historical polluters. Any initiative that addresses migration needs to be counter-balanced by a strong political message that it is the responsibility of the largest historical polluters to prevent dangerous climate change, so that climate-driven migration can be minimized the greatest extent possible.

With that said, I once again thank the organizers for this meeting and look forward to discussing this important topic with colleagues.