

Bundesaußenministerin

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Palau

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Excellencies,
ladies and gentlemen,
women's representatives.

Good afternoon and: Alii!

The ocean is swallowing up our crops, our beaches, our islands, our homes.

This was the frightful message I heard this morning when we went to one of the most beautiful beaches here in your region.

This is what you just told me. And this is what I'll probably hear later, when we meet farmers whose Taro harvest has been destroyed, as the sea is eating into their fields.

I also heard it from a fisherman - who also is a shop owner-, who is not only struggling to find his catch, but also fearing that his house is being swiped away.

When we stand here looking at the ocean, it's like paradise. But the question for you is: how long will this paradise, your home, stay?

Because when sea level rises even further, schools built near the coast will no longer provide a safe space for the island's children. Cultural sites could literally go under. The men and women I met this morning are asking themselves a terrible question, a question that I personally can hardly imagine facing: will our home still be there in 30 or 50 years? When we visited one of your homes just now, I realized that this question is actually not about the next 30 or 50 years, it's about the next ten years.

Time is really running out. It's a concrete threat the climate crisis is posing to you in Palau and on the blue continent. And even though I unfortunately don't understand Palauan, I noticed that, when you just gave a brief introduction in Palauan, you were mentioning the word "climate change" in English - the word did not seem to have existed in your language before.

I'm here to tell you that in this crisis, we don't stand oceans apart. We stand here with you in Melekeok. We stand right by your side.

It's about time that we not only listen from far away or read about this region in the newspapers, but that we are actually here on the ground. I've been told that the last time a German foreign minister visited Palau was 120 years ago. Is there anyone around who still remembers that?

Seriously though, that's not good enough because we don't only want to stand by your side, we want to stay by your side. And this is why we as the German government have decided to appoint a special envoy for the Pacific Islands States.

I would like to introduce to you Beate Grzesk i, who will be the first special envoy to the Pacific Islands States. She will be our direct contact to the blue continent, our voice, our eye and our ears to take our partnership to a new level. Doing that, we are also looking at our future responsibility with regard to our colonial past.

This is something I will be bringing back from this trip to Germany. When I talked to you, minister, on the island this morning, on the way back to the boat, we were talking about the different islands and their cultural heritage. And you were mentioning the cultural heritage that is in German museums, in Berlin and in Stuttgart. Just last week, the German government signed an agreement with the Nigerian government about the return of cultural artefacts, as a part of our Government's commitment to face our colonial past.

I was mentioning to you, minister, that we could look into this as well. And you had a wonderful idea. You made the proposal that we can start by taking photos of the pieces in the museums so you can show your own heritage on your island. And I have to say, for this conversation alone, it was really worth coming to this wonderful place.

I came here on my way back from the G20 foreign ministers meeting in Bali.

Of course, the Russian war on Ukraine dominated the debates there.

That war might seem thousands of kilometers away from here, but its terrible effects are felt around the globe, from Africa to Asia, as food and energy prices rise and millions are forced into hunger and starvation. I have learned that also here, the price of a gallon of gasoline has almost doubled.

The effects of this ruthless war are hitting those hardest who are already suffering from the impacts of the climate crisis due to floods, due to droughts, due to violent storms. You're facing more and more storms here in your regions.

This makes brutally clear that the climate emergency is not an isolated crisis. It is the most challenging security issue of our time.

That is something that you understood a long time ago here on the blue continent, where you are the most vulnerable to the climate crisis, where the crisis touches the core of your security, the security of your existence.

You've raised your voice about this time and again. We heard your urgent warnings in international climate talks. But I have to admit that our response as an international community has been insufficient, our support too limited. That's another reason I'm here today with you - not only to listen, but to see where and how we will take action from here together.

I think we need to do so on at least three fronts.

First, by driving forward the energy transition and the radical reduction of emissions, together, but especially in industrialized countries like mine. Germany has to be on the forefront.

Second, by supporting you here on the blue continent to minimize the impact of the crisis on your lives and to help you to deal with the damage that has already been done and is in some way irreversible.

And third, by pushing our partners to finally see the climate crisis as what it really is, a key security challenge, a crisis that is changing our geographies, accelerating conflicts across the globe. And I'm glad that your government is not only a strong partner but a leading voice in all of these challenges.

I know that we in Europe like to refer to the Pacific Islands as small island states. But frankly speaking, I'm not sure that this description really hits the mark. There's nothing small or timid about your willingness to make your voice heard. Nor is Palau just about

“islands”. Crucially, it is the water, too- this rich expanse of life which surrounds you, which nourishes you, which connects you as a vibrant nation and which defines you as what you truly are: a big ocean state. And that state is taking a stand.

We saw that at the WTO conference last month where the Pacific states, the EU and other partners pushed for regulation on damaging fisheries subsidies for the first time in history. Your voice is taking the lead, but you're also putting words into action.

When we look over there, at the vast ocean, what we are actually looking at is the world's first national shark sanctuary. You ended all commercial shark fishing in your waters. Sharks can now live and reproduce in an area that is roughly the size of France.

This is really incredible and I congratulate you on this effort. Thank you.

You're also front runners in the battle to protect our climate worldwide. It was because of you, the small island states, or as I would say now, the big ocean states, that we managed to rally behind the 1.5 degree goal at the climate talks. You refused to back down! The small island states, the big ocean states, know that if we are not agreeing on 1.5 degrees, but rather on two degrees, then we all will be gone.

We all vividly remember the words of President Whipps in Glasgow when he told the story of Uab, a boy who wouldn't stop growing due to its appetite. He depleted all the natural resources before threatening to eat his people. It wasn't until the villagers united and set Uab on fire that they were saved. President Whipps called on the world leaders to also light the fire, to take bold action to fight climate change.

No region is suffering more from the climate crisis than you do, even though your share of global greenhouse gas emission is one of the smallest. This is blatant injustice.

With the COP 27 ahead of us we want to intensify the cooperation with you in the High Ambition Coalition to keep the 1.5 degree in reach. That means greenhouse gas reduction faster, especially from industrialized countries. This means us, not you.

I hear the concerns expressed by those who ask whether we are now rolling back on our climate commitments because of the Russian war. And there is no use beating about the bush - in the short term, we have to take tough decisions to reduce our

dependency on Russian gas and oil. That means, for example, that we will have to use more coal-fired power plants for now, but only as a bridge.

This does not mean we are wavering from our commitment to 1.5 degrees, and neither does it mark a pause to our drive to accelerate renewables. The opposite is the case.

Russia's war has convinced even the most skeptical in Germany, and I would say in many European countries, that we need to accelerate renewables to guard our energy security. It's not what the Russian president expected or wanted, but his reckless war has given a boost to our renewables drive. We are implementing the most ambitious renewable energy legislation in decades, boosting installations on water and land on rooftops, developing more wind energy sites, speeding up approval processes so that by the year of 2035, Germany is to source its electricity almost entirely from renewable energy. Because we know that energy security and renewables are two sides of the same coin.

In this spirit, we also want to support you. We were earlier discussing your use of a lot of diesel generators here on the island. We would like to support you to move to 100 percent renewable energies.

But we know that mitigation - battling the climate emergency - as crucial as it is to come on the 1.5 degree track, is only one part.

We have failed so far on this, and this is why we have to focus also on the other part. And this is my second message. That is why we are supporting you, our island partners, in adaptation activities at the heart of your culture and prosperity. By supporting fishing communities in developing more sustainable fishing practices, for example, or by helping communities adapt to sea-level rise. In Fiji, we helped to build new houses in elevated areas close to an old village so that the community could stay intact. We supported villagers in planting more heat-resilient vegetables, as well as in planting mangroves to prevent more soil from being lost to the water.

But just as with emission reduction, we know that the work you're doing on adaptation to a warming planet is straining resources. We discussed this also with your minister, who said to me: Well, adaptation sounds so great, but adaptation costs a lot of money. And

you are totally right. That is why we, as industrialised countries, must finally deliver on our \$100 billion commitment for climate financing to developing countries and countries like yours that are being hit hardest from the climate crisis.

It's a priority to me that we improve access to financing for vulnerable countries, countries like yours, because you're facing these problems right now and in the next ten years.

So it's not only about talking, we have to act now. Therefore, we also have to focus on loss and damage. This is an issue we haven't talked enough about for a very long time. And it really is about financing.

It is something which I want to put in the center of our international climate policy.

We are also standing ready to support you in other difficult conversations on the impacts of climate damage that you have told me you need to have. On migration, on preserving your cultural heritage sites, and on clarifying what territorial rights remain even when loss and damage hit hard and irresolvable. We have discussed this earlier: If you own land now, but you don't own the land where you would have to build your new house (due to climate damage) - this brings up the question of who is going to pay for this, but it brings up even harder questions.

The climate crisis confronts us with fundamental challenges, challenges to international law and to our international order.

And this is not a dry academic debate. We are talking about families here on the blue continent who ask themselves, where will we live if our home is being swallowed up by the sea? What nationality will my grandchild have if my state is no longer there?

We also see how these geographic changes caused by the climate crisis risk to spark new conflicts - in a region like the Arctic sea, but also here as islands are at risk of shrinking. What happens to fishing rights and the rights to exploit natural resources? Will the established maritime zones stay as they are? Will disputes resurface?

How does international law respond to all of these questions? Frankly speaking, I don't know yet, but we have to ask this question. We cannot avoid asking this question because you are facing this question in the upcoming years.

And this is why I really would like to engage with you on. I recall many of these debates from when I was a member of the German parliament. I regularly went on international conferences and heard you raising these questions. These are things that don't get resolved overnight, but we have to start this process. I'm here to tell you: Your voice is being heard. We want to have more than an academic discussion. We would like to bring this question to where it belongs: to the international political sphere and to the United Nations, because it's a question that concerns the whole world.

As German Government, we are addressing the climate crisis as a question of security and international peace, because the climate crisis is driving climate conflicts worldwide, from the Arctic to Asia and Africa. A couple of weeks ago, I was in Mali and the women there actually told me similar things that you are telling me. There, it is not the water but the droughts that are fueling disputes over land. Out of the 20 countries most affected by climate change, 60 percent are also affected by conflicts.

For more than ten years, Germany has been pushing the United Nations Security Council to address the security implications of climate change. And I'm grateful to Palau for being one of the strongest voices in the Group of Friends on Climate and Security.

This is one of the core reasons why I have decided that my country is running for the Security Council again in 2027/28: to be a strong voice for climate action - in your region and around the world.

We want to be a strong voice to stand up for our international order, an order that we badly need to address the climate crisis, , an order that is underpinned by the United Nations Charter, and: an order that protects each and every state - no matter its size.

This order is under immense pressure, not only by climate change. I want to tell you, our partners in Palau, how much I value the fact that we see eye to eye on this at this crucial time. When Russia attacked Ukraine, we jointly stood by Ukraine in the UN

General Assembly and voted to condemn Russia's aggression. Thanks a lot for this commitment.

What's clear to me is that we need to uphold the UN Charter wherever it is under attack. Not only in Europe but also here in the Indo-Pacific, which is rapidly becoming a sparring ground for new geopolitical competition.

I think we really have to look at what is at stake when our international order is being violated. I believe it is nothing less than our freedom, your freedom, the freedom to determine who we want to be, how we want to live our life.

What this question boils down to is this: Do we want to live in a world where a powerful state can attack, suppress or hurt its smaller neighbor by force, but also through economic blackmail or coercion? And this is the question you are facing here in your region.

Or do we aspire to live in a world in which rules matter and where we can address challenges like the climate crisis together?

We want international law to govern the Indo-Pacific region - rules that promote reliability, relations in a spirit of trust, equal partnerships and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. And we work with everyone who shares this goal.

What's key to me is the fact that our offer of partnership is open and not exclusive, be it on climate protection, be it on health or on digital transformation. And that we build partnerships that are worthy of the name, built on mutual respect and the interest not only of one side, but of all sides. I will say it frankly: what we don't want to offer are deals that might sound good at first sight because they seem to promise quick and sometimes economic solutions, but which force the smaller partner into painful dependencies in the long run.

Because what's at stake is our freedom, your freedom. Therefore, we need reliable rules and partnerships to defend this freedom and to address the major security challenge of our time: the climate crisis.

In this, we stand with you, with the fishermen who struggle to find their catch, with the Taro farmers who worry about their crop. And with the mothers and fathers of Palau who don't know where their children will live in the future - and who don't want to see their children's dreams swallowed up by the sea. We want to see these children live their dreams, like all the children in the world.

We stand right here, not oceans apart, but side by side.

Ke kmal mesaul.