Iakwe. It is a great honor to address you today.

Ladies and gentlemen, I come from a country whose beauty and vulnerability are breathtaking. Our ancestors referred to our islands as “Jolet Jen Anij” or “Gifts from God”.

Midway between Australia and the United States, the Marshall Islands comprises more than a thousand islands dotted within 29 different atoll chains, often no wider than a road.

While our territory, mostly ocean, is vast, our population is about 50,000 - far smaller than this beautiful city.

It would seem that my country and yours could hardly be further apart, or more different. But there is much that we have in common.

On a personal level, some of my ancestry is European.

On a national level, we are strongly committed to liberal democracy.

And like the European Union, my country also believes deeply in a multilateral approach to solving global problems. The gravest of these is the battle against climate change.

The fight against climate change in the Marshall Islands

We are all vulnerable to climate impacts. No one can escape. But the Marshall Islands is on the front line. Wherever you stand in my country you see the ocean. With an average elevation of two meters above sea level, we have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

King tides and droughts have become more regular and frequent, with disaster often hitting us in different ways, in different parts of our country, at the same time.
One of my first acts as President was to declare a state of disaster because of an unseasonal and prolonged drought. We had less than three weeks of fresh water left. At the very same time, we were on high alert for widespread inundation. The drought lasted seven months and cost us nearly 3.5 million Euros.

The year before this a typhoon wiped away more than 3% of our economy. And the year before that many of our people were left homeless by a single king tide.

Climate change is not a hoax. This is what the everyday struggle against climate change looks like. For us and our Pacific Island cousins, the ocean that has been our life blood risks becoming the cause of our nightmares – and through no fault of ours.

Unless the world keeps its promise to pursue efforts to limit global temperature rise to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, my country risks becoming completely uninhabitable before this century ends.

**Current geo-politics**

But the current geopolitical situation would seem to make achieving the 1.5 degrees limit more challenging than this time last year.

In the 18 months or so since the historic Paris Agreement was reached, the world seems to have been turned upside down more than once.

The leader of the world’s largest historical contributor to climate change has announced that he wants to leave the Paris Agreement. In my view that decision was at best misguided. It was also deeply disappointing and confusing for those of us that have long believed in the importance of US global leadership. This is particularly so for my country – a long time committed ally and friend.

In the coming three years before the US can legally withdraw, we all have a duty to work together to convince President Trump of the importance of climate action.

**Reasons for optimism**

And we have compelling arguments and evidence to do so. I am cautiously optimistic, and so are my people. I have come here today to explain why, and to ask for your help.

The Paris Agreement that we all fought so hard to achieve is a balanced, fair and durable agreement. It is a ringing endorsement of multilateralism. It will stand the test of time.

The Agreement gives countries flexibility to determine their own contributions towards fighting climate change, in the context of collective science-based goals. The Agreement will bring countries together every five years to take stock of progress towards achieving those goals, with a view to raising ambition.
The Agreement provides for transparency and accountability, and sets out provisions relating to means of implementation, adaptation and loss and damage.

Importantly, the Agreement recognises that the national circumstances of countries must be considered in its implementation.

It took us well over 20 years to achieve the Paris Agreement. We cannot do better. And we don’t have the luxury of more time. The Agreement is not open to re-negotiation.

Almost 150 countries have now joined the Agreement. Some 50, including more than a quarter of the G20, since the US election. No one else is walking away. In fact, they are doing the opposite – some have joined in the last few days.

I have been overwhelmed in recent weeks by the widespread global support and commitment to the Paris Agreement, including leaders, governments, cities, regions, the business community, and individuals. I commend Italy for its climate leadership in the G7, and expect no less of Germany in the G20. Such collective acts of leadership are critical and must not fall by the wayside.

Apart from the moral case for climate action, the economic case is undeniable. A recent OECD report highlights in no uncertain terms that any delay in climate action is bad for the economy.

Growing numbers of decision-makers at all levels see this. Real world climate action is accelerating and exceeding national targets. Who could have predicted only a few years ago that renewable energy would increasingly be the cheapest option?

Climate action simply makes sense at every level. This realisation is resulting in new countries emerging as climate champions – including India and China.

We are also seeing countries come together to find new ways to push the boundaries of climate ambition. The High Ambition Coalition, which my country established with the European Union and others, was key to reaching the deal in Paris. That Coalition, which bridges traditional economic and geopolitical divides, is now working towards the full implementation of the Paris Agreement, and the creation of the political space needed for deeper and faster climate action.

In September next year my country will take over leadership of the Climate Vulnerable Forum - a group of 48 developing countries that has pledged to go 100% renewable by 2050. If we can do that, so can you.

At the sub-national level, we are seeing an unstoppable groundswell of collective commitment to climate action. Initiatives include the Under2 Coalition, the 2050 Platform, Mission 2020, the C40 group of cities, and the We Mean Business coalition. Statements of
commitment from US States, cities, and businesses in the last weeks is to be welcomed – and so is the direct engagement of European nations with them.

As the UN Secretary General recently said – the climate action train has truly left the station.

But for a country like mine there is an urgent time imperative. A cost-effective path to achieving the 1.5 degrees limit requires peaking global emissions before 2020, and a rapid acceleration of climate action before 2020, so as to set the world towards net zero emissions in the second half of this century.

The IEA has confirmed this rapid decarbonization is possible but requires unprecedented levels of leadership.

**European leadership to date**

So once again the world is looking to Europe. Thankfully, you have a good track record.

From the Kyoto Protocol and delivering on its implementation; to securing the Durban mandate that led to the Paris Agreement; and ensuring the success of Paris itself, including bringing it into force in record time, Europe has been at the centre of it all. Indeed, in Paris it was the Marshall Islands and the European Union that marched arm-in-arm with others into that historic final plenary.

With that in mind, I pay tribute to President Juncker, Commissioner Arias Cañete, and other European Leaders and Ministers over the years for their commitment. They are true climate warriors, as are many of you who grace this chamber.

Domestically, Europe is demonstrating that economic growth and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases are both possible and mutually reinforcing. Your ground-breaking legislation and policies are being emulated by others around the world.

Leadership must increasingly be about implementation. You are turning rhetoric into reality, and beginning to put in place what is needed to deliver on your Paris promises.

The EU and its Member States together provide about 40% of all global public climate finance. The EU is also the biggest provider of technical climate assistance to developing countries. An important example is the NDC Partnership.

In my country, the EU’s support has on its own helped solarise more than 90% of our outer islands. Every penny is being put to good use.

For all of this I say thank you for your leadership and for your example.
A new era of European leadership

Going forwards, what must climate leadership from Europe look like?

First, Europe must urgently communicate a 2050 strategy to reduce emissions, consistent with the 1.5 degrees limit and net zero emissions in the second half of the century. I have already committed my country to doing so.

Second, in 2018 the world will come together to consider progress and inform countries in coming forward with new or revised nationally determined contributions in 2020. The EU must approach this dialogue open to the possibility of raising its ambition as a result.

We will not stay within 1.5 degrees unless Europe and others move, before 2020, to raise ambition. So, I am pleased to see President Macron has already committed France to “doing even more”, and welcome similar statements by Prime Minister Modi of India and others. This is exactly the race to the top we need.

The 2018 Dialogue, together with the Climate Action Summit which California plans to host next September, and the UN Secretary-General Climate Summit of world leaders in 2019, are the three biggest political moments we have before the end of this decade to push the cause of increased climate ambition.

Europe must be at the centre of these, working with countries and others around the world, to ensure further and faster climate action by all.

Third, I urge you to move to five-year international targets. Ten-year targets risk locking in low ambition, and are less responsive to the latest science and technological developments.

Fourth, the European Union must continue to push ambitious climate action in all relevant fora and sectors, including on shipping emissions and ensuring environmental integrity in reducing aviation emissions.

It will also be important to push for the Kigali Amendment on HFCs to enter into force as soon as possible. My country has already ratified the Amendment. I acknowledge the sustained leadership of the Federated States of Micronesia to this important cause.

The EU must also lead the world in mainstreaming climate action to deliver the sustainable development goals, including in relation to oceans. I pay tribute to our Pacific cousins from Fiji, as well as Sweden, for their leadership.

All Pacific Islands are also extremely proud that Fiji will represent us when it leads the world at COP23 - the first Islands climate summit.

Finally, ongoing leadership of the EU on climate finance, in particular for the most vulnerable countries, will be critical. Support for implementation by developing countries is a
crucial part of the Paris Agreement. Sadly, the US decision to stop GCF funding presents a problem, and one we hope the EU and its allies can address.

Bilateral assistance will also continue to be vital for countries like mine. An even greater focus by the EU on the Pacific region is needed.

Closing

In concluding, I note that some people – maybe even some in this room - think that it is impossible to achieve the goals we agreed in Paris; that is to say that my country cannot be saved.

It is impossible to explain how it feels, as the leader of my people, to see reports or commentary that apparently forecast the oblivion of our homeland, our “Jolet jen Anij”.

I have seen and experienced the forced relocation and migration of my fellow citizens to other parts of the Marshall Islands and beyond as a consequence of the testing of nuclear weapons. So the responsibility my generation has to leave to our children, and to their children and grandchildren, the Marshall Islands as a secure place to call home weighs heavily.

Failure is not an option. As our young climate warriors eloquently put it, “we are not drowning; we are fighting”.

I think I speak for all my Pacific sisters and brothers when I say that.

By working together, the Marshall Islands, the European Union and many others have achieved the impossible before. And we will achieve it again. Because we must.

For your leadership – past, present and future – I say kommol tata – thank you.