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STATEMENT

11TH MEETING OF STATE PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON PROHIBITION OF THE USE, STOCKPILE, PRODUCTION AND TRANSFER OF
ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION

Phnom Penh, Cambodia
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Submitted by Ambassador Ramon Rechebei
Republic of Palau

Mr. President, His Royal Highness, Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning to you all!

Mr. President, I like to take this opportunity, on behalf of my delegation, to congratulate you for your election to the Presidency of the 11 Meeting of the Parties (11 MSP) to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, (known as the "AP Mine Ban Convention") in your beautiful country. I firmly believe that with your able leadership in this Conference and for the duration of your Presidency, I am confident that we will continue to make significant progress toward achieving your priority objectives, primarily in providing assistance to mine victims, promoting international cooperation for elimination of mines and advancing the collective universality of the Convention with the ultimate aim of pushing for mines free world.

Mr. President, on behalf of His Excellency Johnson Toribiong, President of the Republic of Palau and the people of Palau, I wish to convey our deep appreciation and gratitude for the Kingdom of Cambodia and its people for hosting this very important Conference. It is very fitting that after two decades we are meeting in this very country where the movement of banning anti-personnel mines began. In this respect, I also like to extend my delegation's deep gratitude for the hospitality and the spirit of friendship accorded to us since our arrival in your culturally rich and beautiful country.

Last but not least I also like to extend our sincere appreciation and thanks to the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) with the financial assistance from various donors, without whose financial assistance, we would not be able to participate in this august Body.

Progress of the Convention

Mr. President, we warmly welcome the accession of Tuvalu on 13 September 2011 to the Convention and by this exercise of sovereignty we encourage our Pacific partners to do the same so we could work together for a noble goal of pushing for a world free of mines.

From the Progress Report of the Implementing Support Unit, certain progresses have been made toward the destruction of stockpile of AP Mines, stoppage of production by member states and non-member states, as well as caring for the victims of AP Mines; however, there are still a lot of challenges facing the member states, particularly Small Island States, which do not possess resources and expertise and technical skills to dispose of emplaced AP mines, explosives remnants of war (ERWs) and unexploded ordnances (UXOs) in their respective countries.

Mr. President, on Agenda Item 10(a), Palau continues to support the effort of the parties, particularly the developed partners for extending financial assistance and support to the AP Mine Ban Convention, in particular for victims of the land mines.

On Agenda Item 10(b), Palau is not currently obligated under the AP Convention to destroy emplaced anti-personnel mines because it never produced, stock-piled, used nor transported them. The major challenge it is facing today, after the Pacific Campaign during World War II, is limited financial resources for the identification and destruction of UXOs and ERWs in its territory.

With the assistance of bilateral partners, namely Germany, Canada, New Zealand, USA and UK, the Cleared Ground Demining in close partnership with Palau Government has been able to conduct mine action activities in Palau over two years. Cleared Ground and its local team of Palauan women and men, have been conducting risk awareness, survey, and have collected and destroyed a little over 10,000 UXOs and ERWs from grenades to 1700lbs bombs that were mainly from the island of Peleliu, which was one of the major sites in the Pacific Campaign during World War II. The rest of the country is still in need of clearance.

Since Palau's main industry is tourism and scuba diving is one of its main sources of tourism attraction, Palau's land and ocean must also be cleared and the surrounding coastal areas, because the ammunitions which have been left for over 67 years are beginning to leak and self detonate. If one tourist is injured, whether from explosions on land or from UXOs near frequented diving areas, the impact on the economy of Palau will have a serious effect, because the fear of such an event would have devastating effect on the future of tourism attractions in Palau. Palau can be a lesson learned for all here today of the long term dangers of not clearing ERW, but leaving it to decay and destabilize over the decades.

I take this opportunity to thank the Governments of Germany, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom for their financial and in-kind contribution towards the UXOs and ERWs clearance in Palau. I also take this opportunity to appeal to other bilateral partners to consider funding the continuation works of demining in Palau.

On Agenda Item 10(d), the Republic of Palau firmly believes that all States, regardless of size, can play a role in ending the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines. In addition, Palau understands well the challenges of States in the Pacific in ratifying or acceding to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. The challenges could be overcome by effective and useful results as well as good practices in the removal of UXOs and ERWs, which may have been neglected as a major problem for more than six (6) decades. Whilst we are a small nation when compared to many here, a large proportion of our population are affected by ERW. I firmly believe that promoting awareness on the problems and cooperative effort in addressing potential problems of UXOs and ERWs under the Convention will encourage our Pacific brothers and sisters to appreciate the value of the Convention.

Palau is confident that the States of the Pacific can play a leading role in achieving the aims of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and can take head-on any challenges that lie in the path toward this noble goal of pushing for a World Free of Mines.

Mr. President, on Agenda Item 10(f), Palau takes the floor to express its support for the works of the ISU for 2012 and humbly requests for Member States in a position to do so, to continue their financial support for the ISU. Palau fully appreciates the sustained support from the ISU since 2005.

Thank you.