



H.E. Surangel S. Whipps, Jr.
President
Republic of Palau

State of the Republic Address

Senate Chamber
Palau National Capitol
APRIL 25, 2024

A KOT A RECHAD ER BELAU
STATE OF THE REPUBLIC ADDRESS
April 25, 2024

Ungil tutau. A kot e kede mereng a sulel a Dios el ngii a uchul me ng sebeched el keldibl er chelechang. A kumtechei er kid e mo odars a sus er kid el mora Kuoll el Ibedul me a Reklai, me a Rubekul Belau, Kuoll el Bilung me a Ebil Reklai me a re Mechesil Belau.

Senate President Baules me a rebek el Senators, Speaker Anastacio me a rebek el Delegates. Chief Justice Ngiraikelau me a rebek el Court Justices, Vice President me a rebek el Ministers. Governors, Speakers me a rebek el legislators ra ikal teruich ma elolem el beluu er Belau.

Good morning to Ambassador Richelle Turner of Australia, Ambassador Jessica Lee of the Republic of China (Taiwan), Ambassador Hiroyuki Orikasa of Japan, Ambassador Joel Ehnrendreich of the United States, and all Members of the Diplomatic Corps.

E a tokubets el sus er kid a mora re mekekerei el chad er Belau me a rokui el chad er Belau, er a Ngcheiangel el mora Hocharihie me tirkel rokui el ngara ikrel Belau.

This year we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of our Independence. There will be much celebration but it is also a time of reflection on our journey and the vision that guides us.

Reklai, I stand before you today and remember myself as a young boy moving to Palau for the first time with my young parents. I saw the hardships that my father went through and heard my parents debating whether to return to the US or to remain in Palau. What I heard from my father then and saw in his actions was that he was willing to work through the challenges he faced because Palau was his country and the Palauans were his people. He could not just walk away from all the injustice he witnessed in pursuit of his own

personal happiness. He always believed that it was our collective responsibility to work together to ensure there are opportunities afforded to everyone so we can all succeed.

We Palauans are blessed to be part of a society in which each and every one of us can contribute to building our nation. I am particularly blessed that as a young man, the late President Etpison and the late President Nakamura believed that I, too, could help our country and gave me an opportunity to work with them.

This still rings true and we have only had one agenda which is how to ensure that Palauans are first in their own homeland. We continue to work hard to ensure that Palauans get a fair shot, a fair share, and can play under fair rules in order to build and achieve their own Palauan dream.

The vision of A Kot A Rechad er Belau is at the heart of any policy or decision. It asks the question: Will this help our people? Will it add strength to our foundation? Will it allow our children to move forward and succeed in the context of this ever-changing world?

In 2021, we called for our people to join our journey to put the best welfare of the Palauan people first by:

- Advancing a robust health and social services for Palauans young and old;
- Dedicating focus on development promotion, and protection of our human resources to attain a capable and productive Palauan labor force;
- Creating new and equitable economic opportunities for Palauans so they can improve their standard of living;
- Laying a strong foundation for tomorrow's Palau by investing in our children's education, ensuring that our nation will continue to thrive for generations to come;
- Strengthening our national identity by honoring Palau's traditional heritage and respect for peace, freedom, and justice;

- Protecting our natural environment and continue to be a world leader in the fight against climate change to ensure that our livelihoods and homes are safeguarded; and
- Standing in unity with our democratic friends to seek a free and open Indo-Pacific Region to ensure a more safe and secure Palau.

There were many challenges before us. We had become accustomed to being second in our own home, to being paid less than our foreign counterparts, and falling further into debt. We faced:

- An economy that was based on a declining tourism industry and a strangled fishing industry
- An unacceptable Compact Agreement of \$400 million that failed to meet Palau's needs and support a resilient and growing economy
- Antiquated tax system
- Inflation
- Lack of competitive wages
- No professional growth and empowerment for youth and education standards were subpar.

All of these challenges contributed to outmigration. According to the U.S. Graduate School Report, nearly 9,000 left Palau between 1994 and 2020 due to lack of hope and opportunities. Outmigration is reflected in our schools when families leave. In school year 2004 we had 4,245 public and private school students, in 2014 we had 3,194, that decreased to 2,986 by 2019, and 2,976 in the last school year.

The outmigration underscores the importance of the work we are doing to build hope and new opportunities.

Our economy was based mostly on tourism which had started to decline in 2016. As government leaders at the time struggled to

improve tourism numbers, our vulnerable economy and health systems were struck hard by COVID in 2020.

The pandemic led to the closure of our borders. Our hospital was not equipped to handle mass illnesses. Thanks to the help of our partners from the U.S. CDC and Taiwan we had a plan: get everyone vaccinated and reopen our borders. The plan required everyone, you and me, getting vaccinated. It required health care workers to learn very quickly and then work long hours to take care of those who fell ill. Together we built up the confidence to start a travel bubble with our friends from Taiwan. The plan also allowed us to fulfill our commitment of hosting the 7th Our Ocean Conference and then slowly reopen our borders.

TAKING CARE OF OUR HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

If there is a silver lining in COVID it is that our hospital has come through better equipped and with better training. Thanks to the hardworking men and women of the Ministry of Health and Human Services who have partnered with friends from Australia, Taiwan, the U.S. and Japan, we have shored up our capabilities at the Belau National Hospital and our overall healthcare services.

We launched Palau's first ever National Emergency Medical Team, we updated our medical records system, and installed our first ever MRI diagnostics tool. We invested over \$7 million in infrastructure repairs, renovations, and major equipment replacement and repairs at our national hospital. We established an MOU with Guam Cancer Care to bring more affordable and accessible treatment for cancer patients in Palau, and are now preparing for the official opening of a Transition Unit Building at the Belau National Hospital.

We created a Hospital Relocation Task Force, members of which are looking at several sites for a new hospital. The new site will be protected from rising sea levels while also providing the proper

facilities that support more robust health and social services for Palauans.

INVESTING IN OUR CHILDREN

In our efforts to bring our society forward and upward, we have to begin with our children. We have to invest in our children - as a community but also as a government. I have to pause here and take a moment to thank our school principals, teachers and staff.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to visit schools and talk to teachers and other personnel. The changes taking place in our society meant that some children would come to school hungry. Our teachers would bring snacks for their students or share their own meals so they wouldn't be hungry in class and maybe they can focus a little better on their work.

It is their stories that pushed us to ensure we provided a breakfast program for our children. We also doubled the budget for school supplies and textbooks.

I also want to thank our cafeteria workers, who have had extra hours added to their day to ensure our school children can eat a healthy breakfast to start their day.

We are starting to see results from the learning programs and year-round schooling implemented in 2021/2022. It has not been easy for teachers and principals and staff, but I thank you all for your unwavering dedication to our children.

But you all gave it a try. You all shared the desire to see our children succeed. Today, using technology, our children are learning how to read and more importantly they are reading to learn. And thanks to the efforts of our special education teachers and advisors, we are now in compliance with the U.S. Special Education program and are no longer in danger of losing the grant funding that is needed to help our children with special needs.

We have invested more than \$4 million in both grants from partners like Taiwan, Japan, the U.S. and United Nations, as well as local funds into making schools cooler with air conditioning so they can focus on learning instead of the hot days. We're fixing roofs and making school grounds safer and more conducive to learning.

We hope to break ground soon on a new school in Babeldaob for grades kindergarten through 12th.

And thanks to the cooperative efforts of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Human Services, and the Palau National Communications Corporation, our schools are now connected to each other via the internet.

We've invested more than half a million dollars into other school projects including, Ngaraard cafeteria roofing, Ngeremlengui cafeteria roofing, air conditioning for classrooms of five elementary schools, and we purchased two new school buses.

Some of our upcoming projects include: Palau High School gymnasium Renovation, Ngarchelong Elementary School Gym, and Meyuns Elementary School Gym.

And for those who have had to drive through Airai to get to the airport, you may have seen the new gym being built. It is one of several that are being constructed throughout Palau. These gyms, together with the track and field in Koror, the swimming pool, and other facilities represent more than \$10 million in investments to provide our children and our communities with a place for recreational activity.

STRENGTHENING OUR PALAUAN WORKFORCE

Like many of you, I am the son of a fisherman and I myself have driven tourists to rock islands. For me and my family growing up it helped us put food on the table and was a stepping stone to more opportunities.

Unfortunately, today many of these jobs, more than 300 just dive guides alone, are filled by mostly foreign workers. Where are our Palauan guides who can share more than just the facts about the location but also their stories growing up at these sites? Where are our local boat captains who can talk about how the areas have changed with each passing storm or over the years?

The Ministry of Education is promoting vocational training for students, leveraging its intercessions to help students acquire new experiences or certifications. In collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism, and Development, they are partnering with private entities to engage more young people in these training initiatives. One example is SCUBA certification for high school students. Over 30 students have either completed or are currently undergoing diver and advanced diver certification

I think some of those students are here today, please stand and be recognized.

These experiences and certifications can help educate and provide certification for Palauans who want to participate in the tourism industry, maybe as contractors or as business owners.

The Four Seasons' luxury liveaboard Explorer has been a sight to behold, escorting visitors to various dive and snorkeling sites around Palau. Last October, I had the privilege of touring the ship and interacting with the young Palauan crew members who, following training in the Maldives were employed and doing well.

Looking ahead, several exciting opportunities are on the horizon. IHC Hotel Ltd., operating under the name Hotel Indigo Palau, has embarked on a \$100 million project to construct a 187-room hotel, with completion expected by May 2025.

PROTECTING OUR LIVELIHOODS

Providing for protecting our livelihoods expands beyond jobs. It includes our ability to provide for ourselves. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment is leading this effort. The Ministry saw great progress towards its goal of putting Palau on a path to becoming a food secure nation. Their efforts have led to increased food production, new markets for farmers via online platforms, and working with the state governments of Ngatpang, Ngchesar and Peleliu to increase farming capacity.

They have also established a Protected Areas Network Ranger Academy for added protection of our marine resources.

In 2022, we initiated the comprehensive Blue Prosperity Plan. This plan encompasses sustainable fisheries, restorative aquaculture, high-value ecotourism, and innovative business models. These elements aim to strike a balance between economic benefits and the preservation of Palau's ecological resources.

Progress is being made in the Marine Spatial Planning process. A fisheries spatial optimization study, currently being finalized by Secretariat of Pacific Community and Forum Fisheries Agency, is examining a scenario where 50% of our Exclusive Economic Zone is conserved and 50% is available for fishing. This approach aims to balance the development of a sustainable domestic fishery with the conservation goals of the Palau National Marine Sanctuary.

Often times, fishing regulations dominate the conversation but MSP also involves other critical ocean sectors:

1. The tourism sector is currently revising the Responsible Tourism Framework in alignment with the MSP process. This will guide our re-engagement with the tourism market post-COVID, enhance local economic benefits from tourism, and clarify the roles and responsibilities of key institutions.
2. Work is ongoing to design, designate, and fund port infrastructure and ancillary shore facilities to support both the fishery and tourism sectors.
3. This year, Palau became the first nation to ratify the High Seas Treaty. We are now focusing on aligning and advocating for our ocean priorities across multiple ocean-related regional and international instruments. This will ensure these commitments are translated into actionable measures by local agencies.
4. The momentum of our MSP work has led to the formation of a Pacific coalition. This coalition launched the 'Unlocking Pacific Prosperity' initiative, aiming to align philanthropic funding with regional ocean conservation and livelihood priorities.

I am particularly proud of the 'Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity' initiative. This idea, much like the Protected Areas Network and the Palau National Marine Sanctuary, were born out of our tradition of 'bul', a tool our people have used for generations to ensure our marine and terrestrial resources are used sustainably and available for future seasons and generations.

Today, it is a testament to the power of collective action and shared vision. It has garnered significant philanthropic funding, over \$200 million from the Bezos Earth Fund and Global Environmental Facility. It demonstrates the global community's commitment to sustainable ocean management and the prosperity of Pacific nations.

This initiative has brought together partners from across the Pacific, fostering a sense of unity and shared responsibility. This joint effort is not just about unlocking the economic potential of

our ocean, but also about unlocking the collective potential of the Pacific community in shaping a sustainable and prosperous future for our region.

ENSURING OUR SECURITY & SAFETY

We are doing a lot to promote safety and secure our borders. A recent and unfortunate murder case showed how the collective effort of our local community, together with local law enforcement agencies and partners helped bring a criminal to justice.

In that case, and as part of a continuing partnership, we are receiving technical support from law enforcement agencies of Taiwan and the U.S., including the Office of Special Investigation, NCIS, FBI, DEA, and CIA.

Helping to coordinate all of this is our National Security Coordinator who works with security agencies from our international partners. One such example of this coordinated effort is a recent agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard which allows for greater flexibility in monitoring our EEZ against Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and other illicit activities.

That support will soon increase. In November, Palau became the 196th member of INTERPOL. This means our law enforcement can share and receive vital policing information from around the world across a range of crime areas including human trafficking, drug smuggling, cybercrime, vehicle crime and terrorism.

Just a few months ago, the Ministry of Finance installed and implemented our new ASYCUDA system, an integrated Customs management system for international trade and transport operations that helps us track what's coming in through our borders. Just as INTERPOL will help keep bad actors out of Palau, the hope is that ASYCUDA, together with other programs like police dogs at our ports of entry, will be able to prevent the importation of drugs.

This work is critical as we battle drug importation. In the last few months alone, our law enforcement officers confiscated about 58 grams of methamphetamine worth \$57,000 in street value and 469.6 grams valued at nearly half a million dollars. Officers detained three foreign nationals who face minimum sentences of 25 years for trafficking and 15 years for possession.

We also continue to promote accountability among our law enforcement officers with programs like the new Office of Professional Conduct to oversee training and certification of law enforcement officers and also address police misconduct.

In 2023, we started random drug testing and, unfortunately, we have had law enforcement officers who tested positive for drugs. We have programs to help those who use or abuse drugs but this is one area where we know we have to do better.

We have been working hard to fight human trafficking. Thanks to the work of the anti-human trafficking working group we are no longer on the Tier 2 watch list and are working toward the goals that bring us to Tier 1.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

To support government operations on the national and state levels, there was much work that needed to be done after the COVID pandemic to build up our tourism industry and to diversify to include new markets and high-end tourism.

We successfully resumed regular flights with United Airlines and have since expanded our tourism markets. We're grateful to Taiwan for their assistance in restoring China Airlines flights. In March, we greeted our first flight from Narita, Japan, since the onset of COVID, and we anticipate more arrivals this month. In addition, we've welcomed charter flights from Cambodia Airways and Batik Airline.

Our ongoing partnership with Australia has helped diversify tourism, promote economic growth and strengthen government, business and community ties. Through Australia's Pacific Flights Program, Nauru Airlines connects Micronesia and Australia with a weekly service that commenced in December last year.

Air Niugini's efforts and marketing in Australia has laid the groundwork to realize further opportunities with Australia on tourism, trade and to capitalize on government, business, and community linkages. While Air Niugini's services from Australia via Port Moresby conclude shortly, Palau and Australia are in discussions about ongoing connectivity and tourism efforts to build on this foundation. We look forward to sharing more in the next few days.

We have extended an invitation to the U.S. military to visit Palau more frequently. This has resulted in visits from the USNS Mercy, which provided free healthcare to thousands of residents, and Pacific Partnership which provided humanitarian assistance. Amidst the pandemic, military exercises like Koa Moana and Valiant Shield helped to keep our economy going. In addition, apprenticeship programs conducted by the Civic Action Teams provide Palauans with skills they can use to get jobs or move up in their current fields.

MHRCTD is working to promote tour operations certifications among Palauans. They're encouraging more hikes in areas like Ngermalk, Long Island, and helping to promote programs that immerse our visitors in our local culture like the Airai Cultural Tour, and more programs in Airai, Ngchesar, Melekeok, Ngiwal, Aimeliik, Ngaraard and Ngarchelong. These initiatives offer unique experiences that appeal to many of today's adventure-seeking travelers.

Improving our economy necessitates addressing our outdated tax system, which has long favored tourists, foreign companies, and

the affluent. In 2021, the OEK courageously passed a comprehensive tax reform, implemented on January 1, 2023.

The PGST replaced the GRT and Import tax. The GRT system was regressive and cascading, adding 4% of the cost each time a product was sold. This meant that those at the bottom of the supply chain, the lowest earners, paid the most. Today, everyone pays a flat rate of 10%. This change affects those who previously paid no taxes because they purchased off-island and shipped items in, as well as those who purchased from larger downtown stores.

On the wages side, all income between \$8,000 and \$40,000 saw a tax reduction from 12% to 10%. Tax refunds were introduced for those who earned less than \$15,000, refunding all the taxes they paid.

Social benefits were also introduced. A Palauan Child subsidy of \$100 per child was established. We submitted a supplemental budget bill in March which would increase this subsidy to \$200 per child, with no income threshold. That same proposed budget bill includes a tax refund for those who earn between \$15,000 and \$30,000.

We also created a subsidy for those who sell Makit and have gross sales less than \$15,000 a year. The disability fund was increased. And anyone not earning an income will be entitled to \$480 a year.

Small businesses earning less than \$50,000 a year now pay zero tax. For the first time since the end of World War II, businesses earning over \$300,000 a year have to pay a business profits tax. This generates roughly \$4 million, which helps pay for the subsidies mentioned above. In essence, this change benefits the people of Palau.

Thanks to the tax reform, we have been able to support two raises for national government employees, equivalent to \$3,120 a year. We now have funds to better support subsidies for water, power,

and sewer to help keep people afloat as world events cause inflation in prices.

All these policies were put in place to ensure that no one is left behind.

The private sector is the only category that's been overlooked. Senate President, House Speaker, there were two versions of a minimum wage bill that are currently in the OEK. The supplemental budget bill my office submitted in March is the third. Please pass the minimum wage for our nation and for our people.

Inflation is a reality in our economy, increasing typically at about 2% a year. However, it was exacerbated by COVID, the break in supply chain, climate change, and war. In 2022 alone, inflation increased by more than 13%, a year before the PGST was implemented.

The increase in our national minimum wage will help our families keep up with the inflated cost of living while also giving them spending power that subsidies fail to provide.

The wage increases for national government employees and the continued call for a minimum wage increase aim to help our people afford a good quality of life.

WHERE WE ARE HEADING

We are headed in the right direction. The Asian Development Bank just issued a report that shows economic growth for Palau: 6.8% in 2024, picking up further to 8% in 2025. The positive outlook is driven by a significant growth in tourism. Visitor arrivals grew in the 2023 fiscal year by 279.1%, buoyed by the resumption of flights from Taipei, China and Macau.

Supporting this positive report is a construction industry that has been strong and growing.

We're collaborating with the US military on other significant projects, including expanding the runway for the Palau International Airport.

We're also conducting a feasibility study at the Malakal Port. The port, which is over 70 years old, is being expanded in collaboration with Koror State and the US military. The expanded port will be able to accommodate large military and cargo ships, functioning as a joint-use commercial and military port. The expansion will also facilitate increased visits by scientific research vessels, thereby enhancing capacity.

We're also developing another fishing port in Ngatpang.

Another area we continue to move steadily on are road improvement projects. In 2023, with the help of our friends from Taiwan, we invested \$3.4 million to connect the main Compact road to housing areas in Melekeok, Ngaraard, and Ngardmau. We continue the road work in Ngchesar, Ngatpang and Aimeliik.

Building these roads is critical to helping families achieve their dream of homeownership. Many Palauans, including those living outside of Palau and want to return, have raised housing as a critical issue. We have different projects ongoing, including one in Airai where we're constructing a road leading to the initial development of 40 houses. A second phase will extend into the hamlets of Ngchesechang and Oikull. This road will also pave the way for utilities such as water, power, and phone services.

We're also working on other ways to address the housing shortage. We are working with the National Development Bank of Palau on affordable housing.

PUSHING THE ECONOMY FORWARD

We know we have to diversify our tourism but we also are looking to technology for new opportunities for our nation to thrive. Our digital residency program has over 18,000 residents and since starting the program in 2022 we have raised \$3 million.

The Compact Review Agreement that we negotiated in 2023 helps support our efforts to address the needs of our recovering economy.

- The economic package amounts to \$889 million through FY2043 that is 215% of the amount negotiated in 2020.
- It covers health, education, public safety and justice, climate change and the environment, and auditing.
- It provides \$10 million this fiscal year and for the next five years to help us pay our debts.
- \$50 million in fiscal year 2024 and 2025 for the Trust Fund.

A portion of these funds, together with our locally collected tax dollars will support a supplemental budget that aims to help our most vulnerable, including our children, our elderly and our disabled and those who need it most.

Unfortunately, because the OEK has not passed the bill yet, there are hundreds of families who we had hoped to help would not get this assistance for which we have set aside funds.

- **Increase child raising subsidy** from \$100 to \$200, and changing the eligibility requirement to make sure that ALL Palauan children are helped.
- **Increase subsidies for the severely disabled** increase to \$250 for homebound individuals and \$200 for blind or wheelchair-bound.
- **Provide \$480 in tax refunds** for those earning between \$15,000 and \$30,000.
- **Provide Retired Citizens Assistance: \$1.056M** to provide \$480 per individual for retired citizens over the age

of 60 residing in Palau with no employment earnings or business income.

The supplemental budget bill, if passed also would help the:

- Ministry of Education with \$2.25 million for textbooks and other supplies.
- Ministry of Health and Human Services with \$1.9 million for the Palau Severely Disabled Assistance Fund, Public Health & Human Services, and Hospital & Clinical Services.
- Bureau of Public Safety with \$830,344 for equipment and supplies.
- There's \$1.26 million for the Judiciary for, among other things, establishing a public website to host all of Palau's laws.

PROPOSED LEGISLATION

We are working with the Tax Office to identify common-sense amendments to improve the tax system - such as eliminating a few categories of importation tax, including household goods being brought to Palau for those moving here, as well as equipment brought to Palau for scientific research and educational purposes.

We can also reduce the burden to small businesses by prorating the annual business license fee for those who only hold a license for those who do not hold a license for the entire year, and clarifying record-keeping requirements. As with any major reform, PGST has come with growing pains. It is up to us to evaluate our experience, identify areas of improvement, and constantly work to make the system better for everyone. We will be introducing a bill shortly to address these concerns and I ask for the OEK's support.

We also aim to improve Palau's economic health. In addition to the OEK's current efforts to modernize Palau's domestic corporate registry - which I fully support - I will be working soon with the OEK to introduce a new version of the Exempt Corporations Act.

In a competitive field of corporate registries, it is important that we find a system which differentiates us from every other country with a registry - and there are many. At the same time, we must ensure that we design a system that protects Palau. We will be sending legislation to the OEK addressing this.

Another bill we will be submitting is the Electronic Transactions Act - this aims to ensure that documents and signatures are legally valid even if in electronic form. This is based on model law adopted by nearly every American state and territory, and is an essential step forward in moving towards a digital economy.

Also, we need a legislation that fills important gaps in our current economic framework, namely insurance and bankruptcy. I have begun working on a bill to create an insurance commission to protect Palauans by regulating the industry. It also will serve as a revenue-generating endeavor by creating a captive insurance industry.

Lastly, we will be working with the OEK to create a Bankruptcy Code. Bankruptcy is an important tool that will allow honest people to get a fresh start and to make sure creditors are treated fairly. This will help encourage lending and economic activity.

In international surveys, Palau currently ranks very low in terms of "ease of doing business." Solving this problem won't be an easy, overnight process, but will require hard work and a series of projects. All of these initiatives require close collaboration between the executive and legislative branches, and I look forward to collaborating with the OEK to enact these laws and modernize our economy to better compete in today's ever-changing world.

It is at this stage, my fellow Palauans, Senate President, Speaker ...
I WOULD LIKE TO REPORT THAT THE STATE OF THE REPUBLIC IS
STRONG AND GETTING STRONGER.

We couldn't have done all of this without the help of friends, the United States with the Compact Review Agreement and military activity; Taiwan for helping with our tourism, agriculture, blue carbon study, education scholarships and more; Japan for the infrastructure, the Judiciary building, MRI and CT Scan, Babeldaob power distribution, Minatobashi bridge, fishing port, education, and tourism programs. Australia for aviation and tourism support, health software, technical expertise, and more.

As we commemorate the 30th anniversary of our nation's independence, I would like to express my gratitude to all the leaders who have paved the way for us.

It was 30 years ago when we gathered at the Asahi Field in Koror where our Declaration of Independence was signed by President Kuniwo Nakamura, Speaker of the House Surangel S. Whipps and Senate President Peter L. Sugiyama.

It reads:

Kemam, el mlengilt el mengeteklel Belau, a omtechei er a rokui el chad er Belau e dmak er chelecha el kot el kebesengil Ongetruich el Buil er a 1994 el melisiich er a ngederel a kot el ngar bab el klisiich ma ileakl el omengedereder er Belau. Ng dmeu a rengmam er a belumam el di ngii el mengedereder er ngii el okiu a mimokl el deleuill el obengkel a Merikel. Aki mo oureor el melisiich a ungil el roel a siungir a rechad er a chelsel Belau ma berkel a budech er a beluulchad el rokir. Aki kmal mo omecheliu e omtbechel er a meringelchad e dirk klebokel el belumam ma debel ma eltel, el mo dikesir a rechad er Belau el dirk merael el mei e mo medechel el mekreos e diak a ua ingii el klebekelel tial beluulchad. Aki omes el bedul uriul el melai a klubelam er ibetel a cherechar er kemam, e

omes el bedul medad e medengei el kmo ng sebecham, el ultuil er a klisicham ma ulengesuil a Rubak.

On the first day of October 1994 we declared our independence. We affirmed our sovereignty. We committed to social advancement. We pledged to protect our environment for future generations.

In 2021, this administration called upon you, the people of Palau, to join us on a new journey to put your welfare first. We have made strides in health and social services, building a strong labor force, creating new and equitable economic opportunities and laying a strong foundation for tomorrow's Palau by investing today in our children's education. In addition, we stand hand-in-hand with our democratic friends against tyranny and in support of a free and Indo-Pacific that ensures us all a chance for peace and prosperity.

I am proud of what we have achieved together. The journey toward progress, to uphold the values enshrined in our Declaration of Independence, and to fulfill the promises made to our children goes on. We are Stronger Together. We can build a future that is worthy of our past, a future that reflects our shared commitment to the welfare of all Palauans. Together we honor our unique cultural heritage, and have the courage to explore new opportunities. Let us move forward with confidence in our abilities, faith in divine Providence, and an unwavering commitment to our SHARED VISION OF A KOT A RECHAD ER BELAU.

Mesulang. God bless us all. And God bless Palau.

