KEYNOTE

H.E. Mr. Bremity Lakjohn,
Minister in Assistance to the President and Environment, Marshall Islands
(5-7 mins)

As Marshall Islands is a small island developing State, we would also be grateful for your perspectives on: (a) key achievements and lessons learned from the SAMOA Pathway (2014-2024); (b) Marshall Islands' implementation plan of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States (2024-2034); and (c) the role of the international community, including ESCAP, in supporting this implementation.

Madam Executive Secretary, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. I extend my sincere gratitude to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and to the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Small Island Developing States for conveying this critical session under the theme "(a) key achievements and lessons learned from the SAMOA Pathway (2014-2024); (b) Marshall Islands' implementation plan of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States (2024-2034); and (c) the role of the international community, including ESCAP, in supporting this implementation

For Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the unprecedented threat of climate change and recurring natural disasters has overshadowed and intertwined with all development goals. To support SIDS in mitigating this threat, accords were struck in Barbados (1994), Mauritius (2005), and Samoa (2014), and most recently in the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States (or ABAS) in 2024.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands therefore appreciates the opportunity to contribute to these critical discussions on Programmes of Action for Sustainable Development Ambitions, highlighting its achievements and lessons, as well as the path walked with partners in support of mitigating risks faced by SIDS in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Distinguished delegates,

Our aspiration for the Republic of the Marshall Islands is a future marked by resilience, prosperity, and inclusivity; which is in line with the aim of ABAS, that endeavours to guide SIDS towards resilient prosperity and sustainable development by addressing their unique vulnerabilities and charting a path toward a safe, healthy, secure and sustainable future. To achieve this, we must strengthen our human and financial foundations, safeguard our natural and cultural heritage, and ensure that every Marshallese and all SIDS residents have the opportunity to thrive.

As such, the valuable lessons drawn from the **Samoa Pathway process** will continue to serve as a foundation for informing and guiding the successful implementation of the **ABAS**. Central to this is:

1. **First, the emphasis on robust national ownership and leadership, coupled with a nuanced appreciation of each country's distinct development context**.

   SIDS that demonstrated strong political commitment, like the Marshall Islands, were more successful in aligning national development plans with the Samoa Pathway priorities. In the Marshall Islands, the National Strategic Plan 2020-2030 integrates climate resilience across all development sectors. It was developed through an extensive consultation process and is complemented by a National Monitoring & Evaluation Framework (M&E) that aligns with our regional and international commitments, including the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, the Samoa Pathway, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This will be continued with ABAS.

We, therefore, will require significant partnerships and investments to realize our collective aspirations for our national priorities and our Blue Pacific and call on all our international partners to support us as we set out to establish the foundations for transformational growth in our national aspirations and our Blue Pacific Continent.

2. **Second, reinforcing partnerships to address capacity and financing needs remains vital**.

Realizing the vision for a resilient, prosperous, and inclusive future for the Republic of the Marshall Islands will require sustained investment in our human and financial capital, the protection, conservation, and sustainable use of our natural and cultural resources, and the creation of meaningful opportunities for all Marshallese people.

Many SIDS, including the Marshall Islands, struggle with limited human and institutional capacity, especially in data collection, monitoring, and accessing complex funding mechanisms. This is where enhanced **multi-stakeholder collaboration** between governments, development partners, including ESCAP, regional organizations, the private sector, and civil society, for our shared commitment and collective action becomes key, as it is directly correlated to optimized and synergetic implementation and resource mobilization.

Enhanced collaboration will also ensure that partnerships are inclusive, equitable, and designed to address both capacity and knowledge gaps, which remain vital for effective implementation of the ABAS.

Although effective partnerships with regional bodies such as CROP agencies,, development partners including ESCAP, and civil society organizations helped fill capacity and financing gaps as we were implementing the SAMOA Pathway, one of the lessons here is that long-term capacity development is key for self-reliance and sustained implementation.

On financing, while ABAS repeated the call for increased financing, access remains a challenge. Complex procedures and eligibility criteria often exclude the most vulnerable, when in fact they are the ones who need it the most. In RMI, significant financial support is

needed to implement climate resilience projects, and substantial international climate finance will be required to meet the large costs associated with the implementation of our National Adaptation Plan (NAP). The World Bank projects that by the 2040s, adaptation costs for coastal protection could be in the range of 4-13 percent of GDP, depending on the climate change scenarios, while the cost of protecting infrastructure is projected at 3.7 percent of GDP for RMI. Therefore, financing must be simplified, predictable, and responsive to the unique needs of SIDS. For us to see traction in the ABAS, 3 elements need to be considered:

- *Firstly: Securing predictable, adequate, and concessional financing is critical.*

  This includes increased access to climate finance through the use of tools like the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) to guide resource allocation, as well as support for innovative funding models such as blended finance and regional funds. Financing also needs to be made available at fair borrowing terms, to alleviate debt burdens and enable investment in sustainable development.

- *Secondly: Donors may also consider increasing the effectiveness* of their aid and

  ensuring that development cooperation aligns with SIDS' national and regional priorities.

- Thirdly: Given the above, the *success of ABAS hinges on effective integration*

  into key ongoing global processes, such as the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and the reform of international financial architecture. Without such alignment, ABAS risks falling short of its transformative potential.

3. **The third lesson we can draw from the SAMOA Pathway relates to the enduring relevance of traditional knowledge, which is routinely underrepresented and unacknowledged in discussions and decision-making. Traditional knowledge plays a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining development pathways that are both culturally grounded and resilient**.

SIDS that incorporated Indigenous Knowledge systems into climate adaptation and ecosystem management have achieved more culturally appropriate and accepted outcomes. Local knowledge is a powerful asset and must be embedded in policy and programming. Accordingly, it is essential that development agendas are shaped through a bottom-up approach, ensuring they reflect the knowledge, priorities, and lived realities of communities on the ground.

Accordingly, the ABAS should be led by SIDS, capitalizing on their own initiatives, knowledge, and innovative approaches.

4. **Finally, one of the biggest gaps in the Samoa pathway was the weak and inadequate Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms.** Many SIDS lacked robust systems to monitor Samoa Pathway progress or report results, reducing the ability to adapt strategies and demonstrate impact. For ABAS to be a success, we need to be able to see and measure outcomes, and for that, we need data. Therefore, investment in data and monitoring frameworks is essential for accountability and learning.

   We are encouraged that significant effort is being placed to develop a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for the ABAS, which should see a set of global reporting indicators in place by the end of June 2025. We would welcome support from ESCAP to support RMI's endeavor to include the ABAS as part of our priority reporting processes over the coming years.

   ABAS must incorporate mechanisms for transparent monitoring and reporting but must remain flexible to accommodate evolving internal and external circumstances, thereby ensuring sustainable and effective progress. Such flexibility enables timely adjustments to strategies and approaches as new data becomes available, unexpected challenges emerge, or fresh opportunities arise, strengthening resilience and responsiveness throughout the implementation process.

These lessons learned from the successes and challenges of the Samoa Pathway will help shape the Marshall Islands' implementation plan for ABAS over the remaining eight to nine years.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, while meaningful strides have been made in tackling key challenges, SIDS have faced notable gaps in the implementation of the previous agendas. ABAS offers a renewed opportunity, and if fully realized, it has the potential to chart a transformative path forward—one that empowers SIDS to achieve their sustainable development aspirations.

The Marshall Islands urges all nations to reaffirm their commitment to regional solidarity and cooperation. We must act decisively to bridge development gaps, enhance climate action, and ensure that no country, especially the most vulnerable, is left behind.

Therefore, we ask for continued commitment to multilateral support, particularly from the **United Nations system**, as it is vital in mobilizing resources, facilitating knowledge exchange, and ensuring SIDS' priorities remain visible on the global agenda.

I thank you for your continued engagement and commitment to our shared goals. Kommol tata.