

RMI President Jurelang Zedkaia National Water Summit Opening  
Speech

**NATIONAL WATER SUMMIT  
MARCH 22, 2011  
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER**

Traditional Leaders of the Marshall Islands  
Members of the Cabinet and the Nitijela  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps  
Reverent Enja Enos  
Mayors and Representatives from the Outer Islands  
Members of the Public Service  
Members of the Business Community  
Members of the Non Governmental Organizations  
Representatives from the US EPA, SPC, SOPAC, and SPREP  
Ladies and Gentlemen

A special recognition to our guest speaker, Ambassador Matjaz Sinkovec, Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia. Sir, welcome to the Marshall Islands.

This first summit on water is an important one aimed at addressing the important water sector. Vulnerability of our water resources in the face of climate change is the current hot topic throughout the Pacific.

We are all aware of the serious and immediate threats facing the

Republic of the Marshall Islands as well as other low lying atolls and islands of the Pacific. Here in the RMI, water is not just a health issue – it is also an issue with major social, economic and security dimensions.

In fact, the United Nations General Assembly and Human Rights Commission both declared access to safe and secure supplies of freshwater as an essential human right in 2010. We all have a responsibility to safeguard our water resources for current and future generations.

The protection of the Laura water lens and the catchment area on the airport runway, as well as rainwater harvesting, are but a few of the most effective ways to ensure water quality and supply in the face of depleting water resources. Many proposals and suggestions to improve our water situation have crossed my desk in recent times. Very few appear to have made the link between climate change and adaptation. This concerns me.

This summit is thus very important – both in terms of developing a framework for moving forward in this area but also in terms of developing the case and arguments for integrated water resource management as a key tool for addressing our national water needs. It is particularly important to make the case and linkages at all levels – you as stakeholders of our water resources need to be convincing our policy makers, and to some extent our donors - which will be directly involved in decisions regarding the allocation of funds for integrated water resource management - as to why an investment in water resources is an investment in our people.

We all need to make the economic case of the importance of IWRM for protecting fundamental requirements for life in the Marshall Islands, such as the provision of clean water as well as the protection of this basic asset for the country.

A key outcome of this summit is to agree on recommendations that will be form the basis of our national water policy and the way forward to collaborate together on all aspects of our national water needs.

In doing this I would urge you to consider the practical issues of implementation – in particular how we can build ownership of the vital resources at all levels. I would also urge you to consider opportunities for partnership in moving forward on this important undertaking. The challenges relating to water are too big for the government alone to tackle – we can and we must work better together.

In 1992, the United Nations designated today as the World Day for Water and this year it is celebrated here in the RMI under the theme “*Dren nan Mour im Ejmour*”. Also this year, the National Integrated Water Resources Management Taskforce has appointed our First Lady Hannah Zedkaia as our national champion for water. I am informed that the First Lady has been actively engaged in the preparatory stages leading to activities that will take place today and tomorrow, to continue on to events after the summit.

I thank everyone again for your participation in this important

event and I look forward to hearing the results. I am very confident of an excellent outcome given the quality of the participants and the quality of our professionals. On this note, it gives me great pleasure to formally open the first national water summit here in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.