



Statement Delivered by H.E. Surangel S. Whipps Jr.,
President of the Republic of Palau
The New Era of ISA's Global Mentoring Programme See Her Exceed (SHE)
Kingston, Jamaica
July 27, 2026
1pm – Plenary Room

Alii, and good afternoon.

Secretary-General Carvalho, Ambassador and Permanent Secretary Sheila Sealy Monteith, Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me begin by thanking Secretary-General Carvalho and the International Seabed Authority, together with France and Belgium, for bringing us together today.

In Palau, the leadership of women is not a new idea. It is who we are.

Palauan society is matriarchal and matrilineal. Our clans, our land and our identities are passed through the maternal line, and women have always held an important place in the governance and decision-making of our communities.

The ocean, too, is part of who we are. It has fed us, connected us, shaped our culture and sustained our communities for generations.

Our ancestors were ocean scientists long before we used that term. Through generations of observation and experience, they developed an extraordinary understanding of the ocean and understood that knowledge brought with it a responsibility to care for it.

Today, a new generation of Pacific scientists is carrying that tradition forward.

Palauan women such as Elsei Tellei, Maikani Mereng Andres and Elchung Hideyos are expanding our knowledge of the deep ocean through science, exploration and education.

And there is another remarkable daughter of Micronesia I want to recognise today: Dr Nicole Yamase.

Nicole is from the Federated States of Micronesia and spent part of her childhood in Palau. In 2021, she became the first Pacific Islander to descend to Challenger Deep, almost eleven kilometres beneath the Pacific Ocean.

Our Micronesian ancestors were among the greatest ocean navigators the world has known, crossing enormous distances by reading the stars, winds and waves.

Generations later, Nicole travelled in another direction, to the deepest known point of that same ocean.

And she carried Micronesia with her.

I hope one day stories like Nicole's will not be extraordinary because a woman, or a Pacific Islander, was the first to enter a particular scientific space. They will simply be part of the story of ocean science.

That is why initiatives such as See Her Exceed matter.

Women working at sea continue to encounter structural, cultural and practical barriers. Mentorship matters. Training matters. Safe working conditions matter. And opportunity matters.

For Big Ocean States like Palau, this is also about ensuring that the greatest expansion of human knowledge about the deep ocean does not take place around us while our own people remain on the margins of producing that knowledge.

Pacific people must be at the centre of that work as researchers, scientists, lawyers and decision-makers. Pacific women must be fully represented among them.

That is why I welcome the next phase of See Her Exceed and the launch of the SHE Gender Compact today, including its expansion into the Law of the Sea. Scientific and legal capacity are both essential if developing States are to participate meaningfully in decisions about our ocean.

Secretary-General, I congratulate you and your team for keeping these issues at the heart of the Authority's work. As an ocean scientist, diplomat and woman from the Global South, you understand what becomes possible when doors are opened.

I speak about this not only as President of Palau, but as the proud father of three daughters. I want them, and every girl and young woman, to believe they can go as far as their talents and ambitions will take them.

And to the women already working at sea, studying the deep ocean and opening doors for those who follow: thank you.

I hope girls growing up throughout our Blue Pacific see Nicole and our Palauan women scientists and understand something very clearly:

There is a place for you in ocean science and ocean governance.

There is a place for your knowledge and perspective.

And there should be no part of our ocean, however distant or however deep, where you cannot go.

Mesulang. Thank you.