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Oceans apart, but closer than you'd think

Jan. 19, 2010

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Though far apart, Israel and my country are not so different. Nauru is a small, isolated island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Israel is an island in its own right, surrounded by a sea of unfriendly neighbors. Nauru lacks a diversity or abundance of natural resources, especially water and energy. Israel also grapples with a scarcity of these critical resources.

And both Nauru and Israel face threats to their very existence. Nauru's great challenge comes in the shape of climate change. Scientists warn that within our children's lifetimes, sea levels may rise by more than a meter. This would wipe out low-lying coastal areas, making many Pacific islands a distant memory. Israel is confronted by those who would deny its right to exist and attempt to relegate it to the history books.

The threats facing Nauru and Israel both have a human genesis. With Nauru, it comes from people's disregard for the consequences of their actions and the efforts of a few powerful interests to protect their destructive business practices. With Israel, the threat comes from overt aggression. In both cases, though, others are attempting to dictate our fates. Whether overtly or indirectly, others are depriving our communities of the peace and security that are the natural rights of all human beings.

When confronted by these powerful forces, it is important to have friends on whom you can rely. Nauru is proud of its record of supporting Israel at the United Nations. We have stood by Israel at times when other countries have not and we will continue to do so. A recent report by the American Jewish Committee, "One Sided: The relentless campaign against Israel in the United Nations," identified 19 resolutions introduced during the 2008 to 2009 session of the UN that targeted Israel. On those resolutions for which Nauru was eligible to vote, it sided with Israel 80 percent of the time and abstained from the rest.

I AM sometimes asked why we vote the way we do and if we suffer any negative repercussions. Without question, the pressure to vote against Israel is great, and we do not have the luxury of hiding behind a secret ballot at the UN. I am quite sure that many countries fail to vote their conscience for fear of seeing their vote posted on the public tally. Nauru, with a long tradition of independence and voting our conscience, has no such qualms. In fact, we are often stunned by the cowardice demonstrated by countries far larger and more powerful than our own.

Many assume our votes are nothing more than the result of checkbook diplomacy or close ties to the US. That is simply not true. We receive not a single dollar in development aid from the US. Nauru votes with Israel because of its strong conviction that Israel has a right to exist. Together with the US, Israel and Nauru are united by a commitment to democracy and human rights. We recognize Israel's

unique status in a region where these principles are not found in abundance.

I visited Israel personally in 2008 through Project Interchange, an institute of the American Jewish Committee. During my visit, I walked through the streets of Ashkelon and Sderot. I saw the menace to innocent civilians posed by the Kassam rockets. For me, the visit confirmed just how one-sided the UN has become. Why must Israel defend itself from political attacks at the UN every time it defends itself from violent attacks at home? I sincerely hope there comes a day when the international community stands behind the nation of Israel rather than behind the countries who deny the Holocaust and preach intolerance and hatred.

This week, I am honored to again visit Israel through Project Interchange and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the esteemed company of the President of Nauru, Marcus Stephen, the Naurun Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Kieren Keke as well as the President of the Federated States of Micronesia, Emanuel Mori and Minister of Foreign Affairs Lorin Robert to further enhance and expand the important ties between our countries.

Why does Nauru vote with Israel? Because Israel is the lone democracy in its neighborhood and therefore, it is the right thing to do. And doing the right thing is its own reward.

The writer is ambassador of Nauru to the United Nations.

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