



REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

Statement

by

His Excellency Anote Tong

President of the Republic of Kiribati

**The General Debate of the 64th General
Assembly**

25 September 2009

(Check Against Delivery)

Mr. President,
Excellencies
Secretary General
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

Kam na mauri!

I am honoured to be addressing this august body on behalf of the people of Kiribati.

Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the Presidency of the 64th Session of the General Assembly. The tasks ahead of you, and indeed ahead of all of us, are challenging. I am confident, however, that with cooperative efforts and commitment by all of us and with your able leadership of this Session, we will rise to the challenge before us.

Let me also thank your predecessor, His Excellency Father d'Escoto Brockmann, for his commendable leadership during the last session.

Common Challenges

Mr. President,

Every year, we gather in this Chamber to deliberate on the daunting challenges that continue to confront us as citizens of the international community. We gather as Leaders to find solutions to these challenges – solutions that will ensure the survival of humanity, today and tomorrow.

Climate Crisis

Climate change is indeed the greatest moral challenge of our time. I fear that our children and grandchildren will look back and ask, “How is it that they knew what they knew, and yet did so little?” We simply cannot afford the consequences of inaction. The people of my country are already feeling the impacts of climate change, which will

only worsen with time. We, together with those of other low lying states, are the human face of climate change.

Mr. President,

I have been advocating a combination of pragmatic adaptation strategies for my people. It is our overwhelming desire to maintain our homeland and our sovereignty. However, with the inevitable decline in the ability of our islands to support life, let alone increasing populations, due to rising sea levels, we must also provide opportunities for those of our people who wish to migrate to do so on merit and with dignity. Our approaches will be time relevant, responding to the different levels of threat and impacts of climate change on our islands and our people at a given point in time.

We expect greenhouse gas emitters to take appropriate mitigation actions. We ask for assistance with our adaptation efforts, and we ask those who might need our labour to open their doors. It is important to stress that these options are not mutually exclusive.

Our relocation strategy requires the support of the international community. On previous occasions I have referred to existing initiatives with our regional development partners. I am grateful to the Governments of New Zealand and Australia for their support through the Pacific Access Category Scheme, the Kiribati Australia Nursing Initiative and the Australia Pacific Technical College. These are models which we believe can be implemented more broadly, as win-win options for all concerned.

Pacific Leaders have agreed to work together to address climate change through the 2008 Niue Declaration. Internationally, the Declaration adopted by AOSIS Leaders a few days ago outlines issues of importance to the Small Island Developing States and calls for action on climate change, particularly in the lead up to Copenhagen. The UN Resolution on *Climate Change and its Possible Security Implications* is a landmark decision of the General Assembly, acknowledging a link between climate change and security. I commend our Pacific Ambassadors in New York for initiating and driving this resolution and I thank co-sponsors for their support.

Mr. President,

I appreciate that reaching consensus in Copenhagen will be very difficult, but I believe that it is possible.

If we can mobilise trillions of dollars to address the challenges to the global economy, then we are capable of taking the actions necessary to deal with the challenges to the global environment.

Over the past few days, I have been deeply heartened to see Leaders' strong commitment to the need to tackle this common challenge together; to hear Leaders' resolve to look beyond national interests and focus on the global interest; by the Leaders' understanding of the predicament of those on the frontline of climate change; to see the Leader's strong determination to seal the deal in Copenhagen – a deal that, among others, will address the plight of the most vulnerable.

This has given me hope and restored my faith in humanity and in the relevance of our global community and of global leadership. I strongly commend the Secretary General for his initiative in organising the High-Level Summit on Climate Change. This Summit provided an opportunity for us as Leaders to talk face-to-face and agree on a way forward for the climate change negotiations. I also thank my fellow Leaders for their understanding, compassion and political will to collectively address this crisis and its impacts.

Mr. President,

We must now capitalise on this collective political will. We must instruct our negotiators to act accordingly, to ensure that our common resolve as Leaders is given effect. I know that we won't be able to agree on all issues, but there are some fundamental issues on which we cannot afford not to agree. Let us not waste any more time on diplomatic-speak, posturing and empty platitudes. We know what needs to be done. It has been called many things – a New World Order, a Grand Bargain, a New Green Deal. Copenhagen gives us an opportunity to enter into a global compact for action on

climate change – between developed and developing; North and South; East and West. This is perhaps our last chance. If we do not act now, who will?

Phoenix Islands Protected Area and the Pacific Oceanscape

Mr. President,

The Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) is the largest marine protected area in the world, covering over 400,000 square kilometres, 11 percent of our Exclusive Economic Zone. PIPA is a result of a collaborative partnership between my Government, Conservation International and the New England Aquarium. The preservation of the Phoenix Islands and the surrounding ocean is our gift to humanity. It is our contribution to international efforts to significantly reduce biodiversity loss by 2010. Even now, as we confront the possibility that our islands will become uninhabitable within the century due to rising sea levels, we recognise the value of protecting something that we firmly believe to be the common heritage of all.

Mr. President,

We are indeed encouraged to see the emergence of ocean conservation and management initiatives in the Pacific. Such initiatives include the Micronesia Challenge, the Coral Triangle Initiative and the Nauru Agreement.

Kiribati and the Pacific are committed to the sustainable conservation and management of its ocean. At the Pacific Islands Forum in Australia last month, the Leaders of the Pacific adopted the Pacific Oceanscape initiative, aimed at promoting collaboration and exchanges between marine protected areas in the region and other partners.

We call for support for this initiative from the international community.

LDC Graduation and MDGs

Mr. President,

The severe impacts of the climate crisis, and the international financial, food and energy crises have hindered our efforts to achieve sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals.

The particular economic and environmental vulnerability of Kiribati as a Small Island Developing State should be taken into account when considering us for graduation from Least Developed Country status. Assistance provided to LDCs assists us at this point in time in our efforts to address challenges we face as a nation. To lose this assistance would be detrimental to our developmental efforts and to the livelihood of our people.

We reiterate our call to the United Nations to reconsider the listing for graduation of Kiribati and other countries in the Pacific.

Global Governance

Mr. President,

The United Nations is undergoing change to adapt to the realities of our time. It must maintain its relevance to address the security challenges that the world continues to face.

We believe that the United Nations should be an inclusive organisation, particularly for States such as Taiwan that have demonstrate time and again their willingness and ability to contribute positively to international cooperative efforts .

Taiwan has demonstrated its commitment to international peace and security through its contribution to national, regional and international development programmes. It is only fair, therefore, that Taiwan be allowed to participate meaningfully in meetings and activities of the United Nations organs. Given the impacts of climate change and the demands of aviation safety and security on its development and the well-being of its people, we now appeal for the meaningful participation of Taiwan in the work and

activities of the International Civil Aviation Organization and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Conclusion

Mr. President,

In the face of common challenges facing the global community, it is encouraging to hear Leaders call for a new global order; one where our interests as fellow citizens of the planet override national interests, particularly where global human security and lives are under serious threat. This call reaffirms the principle of collective responsibility for the common challenges that we face.

The United Nations will continue to play a significant role in this new world order, particularly in mobilising the political will and the necessary action and resources required to implement it.

Copenhagen will test the political will and commitment we declared here as Leaders. It will determine the fate of the most vulnerable and, eventually, the whole of humanity.

Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa