



REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY TE BERETITENTI (PRESIDENT) ANOTE
TONG, 68TH UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

25 SEPTEMBER 2013

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Mr President;

Excellencies;

The Secretary-General;

Distinguished delegates;

Ladies and gentlemen

I bring to you all warm greetings from the people of Kiribati, on whose behalf I am privileged to once again address this august body.

Mr President,

I echo the sentiments conveyed by previous speakers in congratulating you on assuming the Presidency of the 68th session of this General Assembly. We are indeed very proud to have a fellow brother from the Small Island Developing States presiding over this session.

I am confident that under your able stewardship, our organisation will continue its work towards improving the security and quality of life for all members of our global community, in particular those who are most vulnerable. Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge with appreciation the commendable leadership of your predecessor, His Excellency Mr Vuk Jeremic.

Mr President,

I also commend the untiring commitment and work of our Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon who has served as an able navigator of our ship, steering the United Nations through the diverse and complex realities and the myriad of challenges facing our peoples and nations.

The people of my country and of our region reiterate our deep gratitude for his personal commitment to the issue of climate change and the plight of the most vulnerable. Our people still remember, with fondness, the Secretary-General's visit to Kiribati in 2011, particularly significant as it was the first visit to our country and to our region by the head of the United Nations. I am also heartened and humbled to hear that his visit brought home for him the stark realities of the challenges facing our people, living as they are on the front line of the climate challenge.

Mr. President,

The challenges facing us as we gather again in New York for this session are perhaps greater than when we did a year ago. Security challenges posed by climate change, conflicts, terrorism, transnational organised crime and others continue to undermine our efforts as a global family to achieve sustainable development, peace and security for our global community.

In the past few weeks, we've seen heart-breaking events unfolding here in the United States, in Syria, in Pakistan, in Kenya and in other parts of the world, giving evidence of the growing security threats to our peoples from within our own societies. We share and join in prayer with the families of all those affected by these barbaric and terrorist acts.

Mr President,

The ongoing work of the United Nations and for us at this session reflects these challenges and you have appropriately selected the theme "Post-2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage" for our discussions this week. Kiribati welcomes this theme. It provides an opportunity for us to reflect on what we have done and achieved as individuals, as leaders of our countries, and together as a global body entrusted with securing a more peaceful, secure and better world for our people. We must ask ourselves if what we are doing is in the best interests of our people, or of just a select few. We must look at our efforts as leaders of this

global family, and ask ourselves if we are doing the right thing for our children and their children, whose future is in our hands.

Climate Change

Mr President,

This is the eighth time I have had the honour to address this Assembly in my ten years as President. On each occasion, I have sought to convey the same message. On each occasion, I have spoken of the real and existential threat to my nation. On each occasion, I have called for urgent action to address climate change and sea level rise, to ensure the long-term survival of countries like mine.

I said last year that I will continue to speak of the peril faced by my country for as long as I have breath in my body. Well, I'm still breathing, and the peril remains.

This is a critical issue for the survival of our people and indeed for all of humanity. Many of you here today are parents, or even grandparents. My wife and I have been blessed with 10 grandchildren. Surely the world that we want to leave to our grandchildren should be a better one than what we inherited. But we are not on course to achieve this.

In fact, we are disastrously off course. The scientists tell us that calamity awaits, and not just for those of us on low-lying islands. What we are experiencing now on these low-lying atolls is an early warning of what will happen further down the line. No one will be spared. We cannot continue to abuse our planet in this way. For the future we want for our children and grandchildren, we need leadership. We need commitment. And we need action.... NOW

When we all return home to our children, and grandchildren we must be able to look them in the eye and tell them with confidence that we have done all that is humanly possible to combat the devastating consequences of climate change.

Mr President,

We are grateful to the General Assembly for acknowledging climate change as a matter warranting the attention of the Security Council. And I applaud the commitment of our Secretary-General to this specific security threat, and particularly welcome his recent announcement to convene a High Level Summit on Climate Change next year, the most significant opportunity since the 2009 conference in Copenhagen.

But the Secretary-General needs the support of all nations to ensure that the action necessary to address climate change is taken.

We must step up our national and collective efforts to mitigate global greenhouse gas emissions. We must urge major greenhouse gas emitters to do their part.

We must also call with urgency on our development partners to assist in our efforts to deal with the impacts of climate change and sea level rise now being experienced in our countries, and in our efforts to prepare our people for an uncertain future.

Mr President,

The delivery of international adaptation finance and resources are taking much too long. We cannot continue to stand on the side-lines and wait for others to deliver.

We are taking charge of our situation and moving forward with our mitigation and adaptation strategies. We have finalised a National Adaptation Framework and are now working directly with our partners on this. Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and the World Bank are working with us to implement our national adaptation priorities.

While we are taking adaptation measures to ensure that Kiribati remains habitable for as long as possible, prudence demands that we prepare for the future of our people. We are looking to improve the skills of our people to a level where they are

able to compete for jobs in the international labour market. We want our people to have the option to migrate with dignity

Sustainable Development

Mr President,

On the Millennium Development Goals, our situation has not changed that much since I last spoke before this august body. We are on track on some of the Goals but we continue to be off-track on most of them.

This should not come as a surprise, as most of the limited resources we have continue to be directed from equally pressing priorities towards fighting the onslaught of the rising seas and storm surges and its impact on our water supplies, on our homes, livelihoods and public infrastructure. This is a costly exercise – one we cannot afford – but one that is necessary. We will continue to rely on the goodwill of our partners and members of our global family in this regard.

As we prepare for the Third Global Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa in 2014, the special needs of the most vulnerable, low-lying small states, like Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, the Maldives and Tuvalu, need to be highlighted. For how can we meaningfully discuss sustainable development goals when a disproportionate amount of our time and scarce resources are focused on ensuring the survival of our people?

Oceans

Mr President,

The ocean is a double edged sword for us in Kiribati. Sea level rise threatens the very survival of our people. But the ocean is also an integral part of lives and provides daily sustenance for our people. It can and should be a ticket away from dependency on others.

We are a nation of water. We own substantial fisheries resources. The annual total catch in our waters is valued at some 400 million dollars. Yet, as owners we get only about 8 % of this.

Mr President

Where is the equity and fairness in this? This must change. Our goal is to maximise returns from this resource and we have started on this with the establishment of our first fish processing plant through a public/private partnership. We invite our partners to join us in this endeavour.

I am convinced that given the right support we can achieve sustainable development through utilising the available resources of our vast Exclusive Economic Zone. We believe that through this approach we can reduce our reliance on development assistance. I am convinced that we will even be able to do away with development assistance altogether, if we are provided with the support we need now to develop our capacity to harvest and process our own resources.

Mr President

The ocean is the next frontier in the pursuit of sustainable development. While we have failed to protect our land and atmospheric environments from our human demands we must make sure that the ocean does not meet with the same fate as that of the atmosphere and the land.

The Future We Want

Mr President,

In June last year we met in Rio de Janeiro to review our progress 20 years on from the 1992 Earth Summit. Unfortunately our track record in delivering on our undertakings has not been good. In fact, in many respects our environment is worse off today than it was over 21 years ago.

We renewed our commitment in Rio to achieving the future we want. But we need to move beyond commitments to ACTION.

This future we want will require this organisation to restructure and realign itself to reflect realities of our time. A time in which new and emerging security threats and injustices such as climate change, climate variability, sea level rise and ocean acidification are challenging the international system of governance.

A time in which the future survival of some nations is seriously in question. A time when all those countries with the ability to do so must contribute to the prevention of this calamity or be forever judged by history.

“Business as usual” can no longer be considered to be part of the way forward. Let us not limit ourselves to working within the shackles and boundaries of our comfort zones. Let us be inclusive rather than exclusive. We must listen and allow civil society, our youth, women’s groups and those with the ability to assist and who have a contribution to make to join in the global dialogue and action to address these major challenges.

In this regard we welcome the continued resolve of our Secretary General and yours Mr President to accelerate action on the reform of our organisation and to ensure highest level of global collaboration, accountability, decisive action and instillation of a greater sense of urgency on issues of critical concern to our global family.

Mr President

We also welcome the inclusion of Taiwan in international processes of the World Health Assembly and hope that this similar inclusive approach will prevail in respect of other international institutions and processes where Taiwan and all can participate and contribute meaningfully for the good of humanity.

Mr President,

The Future We Want calls for a frank assessment of our global decision making structure. It requires bold but rational political commitment on a global scale. As Leaders of our global family, we must be brutally honest in accepting the reality that unless we act now on the future we want for our children and their children's children, the prospects for success are bleak.

Conclusion

As we chart the path and set the stage towards a future we want, we must address the fundamental threats to the security and very existence of the members of this family of nations. Once again I call on all of us to ask ourselves the question "Whose interests are we pursuing? Are we here to secure the future of each other's children or just our own?"

This is the greatest moral challenge facing all of us today.

Thank you.