



REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

**Statement
by
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President of the Republic of Kiribati**

**The General Debate of the 71st Session of the
General Assembly**

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(Check Against Delivery)

Mr. President
Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

Kam na bane ni mauri n arana ae e tabu. Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am very pleased to address, for the first time, this global family of ours and its 71st gathering, on behalf of the Government and people of Kiribati.

Mr. President,

I join previous speakers in congratulating you on your election to the presidency of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I am particularly proud to see a Pacific brother leading this august body during this critical period of transformation. I have every confidence that with your able leadership and Pacific wisdom you'll be able to guide us through these challenging times. Be assured, Mr. President, of our full support and cooperation.

I also join colleagues in acknowledging with appreciation the commendable leadership of your predecessor, His Excellency Lykketoft from Denmark, in guiding our work during the 70th Session and in facilitating the implementation of the new Sustainable Development Agenda.

Mr. President,

This is a transitional period for us all. I am very happy that my first General Debate coincides with the assumption of the Pacific to the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly. I am quite sad though that this is the last General Debate of our beloved Secretary General. I have read and observed the untiring service our Secretary General has given humanity and his personal unwavering commitment and passion in focusing global attention on the most vulnerable, particularly the small and low-lying island countries as well as communities on the frontline of the many major challenges facing us today as a global family.

I am so proud to say that Mr. Ban Ki-moon is the first Secretary General of the United Nations to ever visit my country and our part of the world in the Pacific in the 71 years of this premier global body. This is a very rare opportunity and I would like to personally

thank and commend Mr. Ban Ki-moon for taking that bold initiative. It is my sincere hope that the next visit of our Secretary General to my country and the Pacific would be soon and not 60 or 70 years from now. This will be part of the transformation that we expect from our UN family.

Mr. President,

Allow me, on this note, to acknowledge and commend, with heartfelt gratitude, the sterling leadership of our Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. I thank and commend him for being the steadfast advocate for and the voice of the voiceless. I thank and commend him for instilling and reaffirming our UN family inclusive culture that ensures 'no one is left behind'. The legacy he will leave is embossed in the new Sustainable Development Agenda and in the Paris Agreement, the catalyst for global attention and action on climate change. On behalf of the people and Government of Kiribati, I wish our Secretary General all the very best as he concludes his term as head of this global family of ours and as he takes on the next challenge in his unwavering service for humanity.

Mr. President,

We meet at a very critical time in our history. The challenges facing us as we gather at this Session are perhaps greater than when we met a year ago. We note with grave concern increasing security challenges facing our global family. From conflicts around the globe, the scourge of terrorism, transnational organized crime, war and nuclear testing compensations, mass movement of refugees and migrants, to the often unstated but invisible silent killer, the non-communicable diseases, health of our oceans, and other looming challenges and uncertainties, some with incremental but real existential threat such as climate change. These continue to undermine our efforts as a global family to achieve sustainable development.

Let me also add that this Session provides a great opportunity for all of us. An opportunity to renew our firm commitment to our people and our planet to achieving peace and prosperity for all through genuine partnerships. An opportunity to consolidate our efforts and our resources to addressing the challenges we face. And an opportunity to realise the vision we set towards an inclusive world. This is our opportunity as leaders to deliver on our commitment. It is our moral responsibility to do so and we must do so forthwith.

This year's theme: "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world" is a timely and appropriate theme. For in order to address the challenges we

face and to realise opportunities available to us, we must change our mindset, change our path and change our ways. And we must do this together.

Mr. President,

Climate change is a global challenge that requires universal transformation. We simply cannot afford to continue with business as usual. The future of the most vulnerable, like my people and my country, are at stake. We need a major change of global mindset, a major change in global development pathways, and a major global change in ways we do business. We must do this in order to secure the future of my people, and those sharing the same fate, and to ensure that we are not left behind.

Mr. President,

Every year, my country comes to this august family gathering with constant cries for help to stop the momentum of global warming and help countries like mine adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change. It is distressing to see our people continuing to fight the onslaught of sea level rise, storm surges and disasters like Cyclone Pam and Cyclone Winston on their homes, their farmland, their livelihood, their heritage and their critical source of water. And I must say that the increasing frequency and severity of such events have exacerbated the heartbreaking impacts on our people.

Mr. President,

In some parts of our country, whole villages had to relocate due to severe coastal erosion and flooding. Food crops have been destroyed. Our fresh water lens, our major source of drinking water, are increasingly being contaminated by the intruding sea water.

As we enter the La Nina period with drought forecast for our country, water scarcity is already an issue for our people, in our urban and rural areas. This has the potential to trigger other risks such as sanitation, and related health and education issues. Kiribati is closely monitoring the situation with serious consideration of immediate options to ensure the survival of our people. We call for urgent assistance from our UN family and UN family members to look into their hearts and help us address this looming life threatening issue at the earliest, an issue that cannot wait for the Paris Agreement ratification process to happen.

Mr. President,

I came here straight from our Parliament meeting at which the outcry of my people, especially our younger generation, on the increasing intense of impacts of climate change has become quite persistent, demanding swift action right now, without procrastination.

Mr. President,

The adoption of the Paris Agreement last year gave humanity a sense of hope. It demonstrated global consensus that climate change is happening and must be resolved as soon as possible. It is a major first step towards global action against climate change. The next challenge is to ensure the Agreement's early entry into force.

In this regard, I am pleased to say that, following our signature of the Paris Agreement in April this year, I had the honour yesterday to deposit my country's Instrument of Ratification during the High-Level Event for the Entry into Force of the Paris Agreement. We are fully committed to the Paris Agreement and to all climate related undertakings to ensure our global family addresses the root causes and impacts of climate change. The suffering of our people must stop now. The Paris Agreement will not only help us address our challenges as low-lying atoll nations on the frontline now but it can save others in the queue of the most vulnerable from getting to the frontline in the future.

I commend our bigger brothers in our global family, notably China and the United States, for their commitment to this process. I urge the rest of our UN family to join and help save those who urgently require immediate support and action to make this happen. This is an opportunity for us as leaders to push for the early entry into force of the Paris Agreement and transform our world for our generation and, more importantly, for future generations. This is an opportunity for us to take care of each other. And we must do it together, as a family. There is a huge risk for low-lying island nations like mine, Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, Tokelau and the Maldives and countless others living on coastal and areas prone to drought, desertification, flooding, and typhoons to be left behind.

Mr. President,

Global challenges facing our people, especially the most vulnerable, continue to test our humanity, our love and our compassion. These are powerful ingredients for global transformation towards the future we all want. If we fail to achieve this transformation then we would fail our people who look up to us for leadership in improving their quality of life and securing a future for them, their children and their children's children.

Mr. President,

You opened this Session with your grandchildren by your side. This was a moving and significant moment, reminding us all of our most important constituents – our children and their children. You rightfully said in your opening statement that *“it is our call to make because if we fail, then we have failed our grandchildren.”* As a leader and a grandfather, I am fully committed to serving and delivering to all the children and grandchildren of our global family.

Mr. President,

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals have not been developed in a vacuum. These have been reflected in one form or another in our own National Development Plans over the years. It is therefore at the national level that assistance for implementation, including additional resources, capacity building and technology transfer should be directed. This is where such assistance can make a big difference in improving the lives of our people, and especially those at the grassroots level. This will be a challenge if we continue to compete for resources with our multilateral agencies.

On this note, I want to acknowledge with deep appreciation the continued assistance to our sustainable development efforts from all our development partners. But the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda requires much more. *The universal push to transform our world* requires all to contribute. It requires a collective global effort.

Mr. President,

It is troubling to note that for decades and years our global family has continued to ignore the support and instrumental role of those who can contribute and have contributed to the implementation of our sustainable development goals. As some of us would acknowledge, Taiwan has served as a significant partner and has contributed significantly to achieving the objectives of our global family. This must be acknowledged through the increased and meaningful participation of Taiwan in international processes. We need our global transformation to be inclusive of those who can contribute to the effective implementation of the SDGs.

Mr. President,

I strongly believe that any transformation must start from the leadership – at the individual, community, Government, and national level – in order to effect global

transformation. Good governance, transparency and accountability are fundamental guiding principles of my Government upon our assumption into office over six months ago. They underpin our overarching policy objective to serve and to deliver to our people, as responsible leaders.

I am very proud to say that in our first Parliament meeting, we established a Parliament Select Committee on Anti-Corruption. Just last week, our Parliament accepted the first reading of our Bill on the Leaders Code of Conduct. During the same week, our Parliament also passed a Constitutional Amendment resulting in the establishment of a new Ministry of Justice. This will see a strengthening of our justice system that would elevate the level of transparency and accountability. We firmly believe that, as a Government, we can transform our nation for the better if our actions as leaders are underpinned by strong principles of good governance, transparency and accountability. This promotes our people's confidence and trust in their representatives.

Mr. President,

If we are serious and genuine about the true transformation that we are talking about here then I challenge all of us, as leaders and representatives of our people, to ask ourselves this fundamental question:

What is the most important value and gift we have that can break the barrier between our people, our communities, our nations and our global family and which can truly transform our world?

The answer is simple and the common denominator is also straight forward. It is our heart, our love. This has been a missing ingredient in our recipe for global peace and security. Our biggest challenge here at the United Nations is that we have not been sharing our hearts, our love, with each other. In fact, we have been fighting within our own family over the past 70 years. I truly believe that the heart of our UN family is the heart of all nations, big and small, land-locked and sea-locked, rich and poor, the most vulnerable and the less vulnerable, and so forth. It therefore should beat for everyone, not just a few. Just this morning, I had the gracious honour and privilege to join the Federation of World Peace and Love in ringing a bell for love and peace in the world with a special prayer for Kiribati. This is a reminder to the world, particularly to all of us leaders, of our fundamental role as peace makers.

Mr. President,

We are reminded every day of the very purpose of this UN family – to promote and maintain peace and security in all its forms. It is a major challenge but a challenge I believe can be overcome if we start working together as a true UN family – with love, care, compassion, understanding, respect and tolerance. This is a true global transformation that can help our UN family serve its members and deliver solutions and results.

This is a call to us all and a challenge that we can take back from this UN family gathering and ask whether or not we can transform and make a difference in the name of love, a simple but powerful and inclusive four-letter word that resonates in the four corners of the world. As you contemplate on this question, let me end by sharing with you a poem that represents our identity and hope - an identity that we will fight to save as long as we can, but we need you to join us in this fight so that a part of this global family does not lose its liberty, its identity nor gets left behind.

My Frigate Bird

*Cloaked in black, white-bellied, and fork tailed, you are my beauty in the north
With your long and graceful wings, you are my inspiration in the center
As you speed across the deep vast ocean, you are my sanctuary in the south
With your clicking wheezy calls, you are my song and garland everywhere
On a banner of blue, white, yellow and red, you ascent beyond the waves and the sun rays
Now you struggle against storms and westerly winds to find food and nesting
But you will never leave in haste nor go in flight, for you are the fulcrum of the universe
Arise my frigate bird with valor and strength, rise over the perilous tides from the east
And fly brave and proud on the currents of wind, for you are and always will be my transformation
Proud am I to be an I-Kiribati – my frigate bird, my liberty, my identity*

In closing, I share with you all, our heart, our love and our traditional blessing of Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa – that's health, peace and prosperity.

Kam bati n rabwa, thank you very much and may God bless our UN family.