



REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

Statement

By

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Te Beretitenti of the Republic of Kiribati

The General Debate of the 73rd Session of the

United Nations General Assembly

Wednesday, 26th September 2018

(Check against delivery)

Madam President
Excellencies
Secretary General
Observers
Ladies and gentlemen

I begin by sharing the peace and blessings among us all and to convey warm Pacific greetings from the Government and the people of Kiribati. In the name of the Almighty God - "Kam na bane ni Mauri"

Acknowledgement

Madam President, I join other leaders in congratulating you and the Government of Ecuador, for your election to the Presidency of the 73rd Session of the General Assembly. I wish you every success as you discharge your functions by making this United Nations of family relevant to all members.

In the same token, I would also like to acknowledge the outgoing President, H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajcak and the Republic of Slovakia for a very engaging and outcome oriented leadership of the 72nd Session, and thanking the Secretary General, for his excellent leadership in particular the current reform to make the United Nations fitting and more adaptable for now and beyond.

Reflection on the Theme - Making the UN relevant with people at its heart

Madam President, we commend you for the theme you have chosen for the 73rd Session. ***"Making the United Nations Relevant to all People: Global leadership and shared responsibilities for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies"***. Indeed, this is a strong call and reminder to all leaders and the UN machinery, that the effectiveness of our efforts is not measured by how much we have achieved, but by how much those we serve have made a better change in their lives. Clearly, this was the primary intent of the founders that this should be the UN as they envisioned it. It is about servant leadership, where leadership is not only about serving, but more importantly about protecting the lives of the powerless, those without a voice, those taken advantage of by the more powerful in society, and those who cannot help them politically. We are often reminded time and again that these people's lives are "precious" in the sight of God. In her captivating and simple words, Mother Theresa made a powerful reflection on good leadership, when she said "A life not lived for others is not a life". As leaders, it is our shared responsibility to ensure that we see to that.

The theme also provides a timely call for a renewal of friendship, solidarity, co-operation and partnership between and among peoples and nations of the world, allowing greater commitment on all our part, to make a difference to the wellbeing of all.

Contextualizing the theme from national and regional experiences

Madam President, Kiribati had long recognized the prime importance of peaceful living, characterised by our own traditional humble way of living in harmony with each

other and our environment. These are sustained through regular community meetings in traditional local meeting houses called 'maneaba' to discuss important agenda for the village and to address issues under the wise and experienced guidance of the elders. Decisions are made to promote mutual understanding, respect and co-operation among members of the society. A 'maneaba' means to embrace all (*'manea te aba'*), a holistic system where leadership and shared responsibility is undertaken for the benefit of the whole society. In such ways, the maneaba system maintains its fundamentality as central and relevant to the people.

In the Pacific context, there are other various relevant instruments adopted to address socio-economic and political risks and security. Some have worked while others have not. But this does not stop us from our resolve through our own Pacific way to undertake meaningful dialogue, where agreement through consensus serves as a prevalent norm. Also, the Pacific accounts for 20% of the world's ocean in terms of our EEZ and therefore, the completion of maritime boundaries is very critical, to provide certainty to the ownership of our ocean space, in the face of climate change.

UN for freedom

A united world, free from the threats of wars and violence rooted by our greed to dominate others is the kind of world that we want for all of us and for our children's generation. Our ultimate aim is to ensure that everybody can lead a happy, prosperous and secure future. The adoption of the historic United Nations Law of the Sea in 1982 has also enabled us to own and sustainably manage a huge area of ocean, from which we can further improve our wellbeing and enjoy returns from our fisheries resources. The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty has also assured us that the radiation related illnesses suffered by our people during and after the 1960's nuclear testing on Christmas Island and other parts of the world, will not be repeated in the future.

There are many other examples of where international resolutions and instruments have contributed immensely to our national efforts to improve our islands way of life. We have no doubt that other people and nations see the United Nations in the same light.

Strengthening the UN Governance & Accountability

As an organization, the United Nations is bound to be constantly pulled and pushed between two opposing but interconnected interests. The personal interests of those leading and driving it on the one hand, and the interest of the people for whom it exists on the other hand. It is therefore critical that this Assembly has the ability to ensure that, a balance is maintained so that the United Nations does not end up being good only for those running and facilitating its operations.

In this regard, we look forward to the outcome of the reform of the Development system of the United Nations to which our views have been adequately expressed through statements made on our behalf by the PSIDs, AOSIS, the LDCs and G77+ China groupings. In particular, we look forward to the positioning of a new Resident Coordinator to serve the Northern and Central Pacific countries.

We also look forward to the outcome of other reforms and reviews pertaining to the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, the eligibility and graduation criteria in relation to Least Developed Countries and finally, on the financing status of the United Nations.

We also fully appreciate the United Nations with its special focus on the plight of people in developing countries especially those facing special difficulties. In this connection we note with gratitude the Committee on Development Policy (CDP) recognition of Kiribati's extreme vulnerability to climate change impacts, and the need for special support. This gratitude extends to the President and members of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for agreeing to our request to have our graduation case reconsidered in 3 years time from now.

Making the UN financially strong

Madam President, we are concerned to learn from the Secretary General's report the financial difficulties facing the United Nations to the extent that it is affecting not only its services but also the wellbeing of its staff. We understand the United Nations has depended more on voluntary contributions and private sector funding than from assessed membership contributions which is a high risk.

It is therefore high time we re-assess the validity of certain activities of the UN. Activities outliving their times and need to re-align strategies that were quite applicable and effective during the post war years when states were the key deliverers of the UN services. These are no longer effective with UN services becoming the exclusive domain of huge multinational corporations that often put profit making over moral and ethical considerations.

Example is the hundreds of millions of dollars spent annually on peace keeping and humanitarian assistance. These could have been better spent on eliminating root causes of conflicts, armed terrorism and the humanitarian crisis by investing UN resources in the establishment of good governance, with good quality free education and health services. In this way, the collective resources of the world are spent to treat the cause and not the mere symptoms.

We understand discussions are under way to address the financial crisis facing our global family and would request consideration of the points raised above as our genuine input to such deliberations.

Achievements and Opportunities

Madam President, Kiribati has presented for the first time its Voluntary National Review report in July this year to the United Nations. As I had stressed in the video introduction of our VNR, Kiribati has now embarked on a bold and bright narrative - a narrative that carries our people's voice and determination boosted by the various resilience building programs allowing us to forge ahead with a 20 year road map transforming Kiribati into a wealthy, healthy, and peaceful nation by 2036. This is our Kiribati Vision for 20 years or KV20 as it is known, which aspires to move the nation and people beyond business through the unleashing of the enormous potentials vested in our fisheries and tourism.

I must, however, emphasise that underpinning the drive and implementation of this ambitious aspiration, is making Kiribati a corruption free society as part of our strong commitment to champion anti-corruption in the Pacific. We will follow this through with Regional Leaders Meeting on Anti-Corruption in 2019 on our shores. Corruption is undeniably a human risk to all forms of development and it is the weak and the marginalised who suffer and bear the cost of such unethical practices.

Kiribati have also launched for the first time ever, its first Climate change policy. This focuses on building and strengthening the resilience of our islands and our peoples' resilience to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The policy highlights priority areas in water and sanitation, coastal protection and renewable energy and will serve as the country's national compass for delivery of all climate change programmes in Kiribati. We acknowledge our many partners who had and continue to work with Kiribati. We welcome those who are also ready to work and journey together with us to build and strengthen the resilience of our people and islands.

Kiribati's contribution to the world

To this end, I am pleased to reaffirm that we are continuing to maintain 11% of our EEZ in the Phoenix Islands (comprising over 400,000 sq.km of ocean) as a marine protected area. This well-known area, the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) is considered as a powerful and effective tool for the rejuvenation of tuna fisheries and other marine organisms and a source of resilient coral species called "super corals".

From our understanding of the early findings of science, PIPA is home to one of the richest and most diverse and resilient marine ecosystem on earth. It has the potential to become the most powerful source of marine life enrichment and provides solutions for many of the problems facing humanity, that the 2030 Agenda is trying to address. By closing off the area to commercial fishing, we have sacrificed a substantial amount of income from fishing licenses every year, estimated at about 10% of our annual fishing revenue, which on average is \$10million per year. That is revenue forgone, but this is part of Kiribati's strong commitment to implement the UN's SDG goals. In addition, I am also proud to inform that Kiribati has also declared our entire EEZ as the shark's sanctuary which has been domesticated in our laws.

In this respect, we commend current efforts towards creation of new legally binding instruments on the use of marine biological diversity in areas of sea outside our EEZ, migration, and on the environment, all of which are very important for small islands like Kiribati including other nations and peoples.

The Way Forward

Madam President, the UN theme that will be delivered in the next 12 months is about all the people living on this planet. This theme will be irrelevant if the UN continues to ignore that 23 million people who live and contribute to our shared home and continue to exclude them from the process. We are one family and we therefore call on an inclusive approach to have Taiwan participate in international processes and to allow

it to contribute to address areas of concern to this UN body and the implementation of the SDGs.

For so long, we have been confined in our human desire to dominate and to be more than others, the continuous hunger for power, dominance, and lack of consideration, compassion and respect for others to pursue sustainable development in their own right and space. But let us remind ourselves and this UN family of an equally important responsibility of recognising a space for a joint service for prayer in our UN family. The objective is to seek divine guidance to guide our work agenda. Quite often, we tend to overlook the importance of divine guidance as a powerful tool that can really unite our hearts for a common and shared aspiration in making the United Nations, a truly relevant global institution to all people and in building the trust, respect and love that we all need to make a difference.

May God's grace and compassion continue to bless our hearts as we strive to strengthen our organization. In conclusion, I wish to share our Kiribati's traditional blessings of Te Mauri, Te Raii ao Te Tabomoa, meaning Health, Peace and Prosperity, to us all.

I thank you all.