



78th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY TANETI MAAMAU
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI
“GENERAL DEBATE OF THE SEVENTY-EIGHTH SESSION”
22 SEPTEMBER 2023

Theme: “Rebuilding Trust and Reigniting Global Solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 agenda and its sustainable development goals towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all.”

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

At the outset allow me to share warm greetings from the Government and the people of the Republic of Kiribati. In the name of the Almighty God whom we place our trust in and is our anchor of solidarity, Kam na bane n Mauri!

Acknowledgement

Mr. President,

I join previous speakers in congratulating you on your election and I wish you every success as you guide these important deliberations.

Contextualising the theme

Mr President,

The theme, "*Rebuilding Trust and Reigniting Global Solidarity for Accelerating Action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards Peace, Prosperity, Progress, and Sustainability for All,*" resonates deeply with the aspirations of our people.

In our fast-changing world, predicated by multiple challenges, part of the theme to "rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity", is very timely and crucial.

As we all know trust is the corner stone of any relationship that when strained it creates uncertainties, mistrust and in-stability. Geopolitical

tensions, economic disparities, and the unforeseen challenges brought about by events like pandemics, climate-related crisis and disasters have tested the resolve of national governments, their peoples, and their partners.

The call to "rebuild trust" therefore, highlights the need for countries to re-establish faith in multilateral cooperation and diplomacy. It highlights the importance of transparent communication, mutual understanding, and engaging with each other to forge strategic partnerships for our common good and development. A renewed commitment to accountability, good governance, and responsive policies can contribute to a more engaged and empowered global community.

Reigniting global solidarity

At the same time, the call to "reignite global solidarity" reflects our recognition that our global challenges and opportunities are intertwined. It encourages countries not only to recognize but also deliver actions to resolve issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and healthcare. The idea of global solidarity underscores the principle that no nation can thrive in isolation and recognises the uniqueness of each country's context and need. The experience from COVID-19 pandemic is an exemplary of the world coming together as one family. While we recognize the essence of science to address pandemics, it is important for member states to work together to gain a better understanding of the variants and vaccines before they are rolled out.

Accelerating Action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals

Mr President,

Since the launching of the SDGs in 2015, my government launched Kiribati's first-ever long-term development plan, identifying our priorities for development. The Kiribati Vision for 20 Years is rooted firmly on the needs of all I-Kiribati and commits my government to transform Kiribati into a wealthier, healthier, and peaceful nation. It recognises the need to align our national priorities with the SDGs and complement our national efforts with those outlined by our UN family. My government takes this seriously and has implemented national actions to achieve our goals.

In 2018, my government became one of the few member States that delivered a voluntary national report (VNR), outlining our policy actions to achieve our SDGs. The VNR enabled us to take stock of our development and assess our future.

To ensure sustainability and ownership of our desired developmental goals, we have engaged in extensive consultations at all levels.

As the year 2030 is imminent, time is of the essence. It is imperative for our UN family to stay on track in our efforts to achieve our goals set forth in the SDGs. This entails setting ambitious targets and mobilizing resources, technology, innovation, and policy changes to ensure the goals are achieved on time. However, there is no guarantee that SDG goals will be achieved, therefore Kiribati's graduation from a Least Developed Country would not be sustainable.

Maintaining Peace

Mr President,

Since our independence in 1979, our nation has enjoyed 44 years of stable and peaceful governance.

We continue to recognize the independence of the three arms of government trusting that each arm discharges its duties with the highest level of integrity in a transparent, respectful, and honest manner. We are committed and determined to ensure that Kiribati remains peaceful as we chart our future. But peace can be precarious as determining factors are often beyond our control. We have the human resources yet lack the capacity or necessary skills to develop our country. Equally important is our commitment to maximise benefits to our people, uplift our communities, and maintain our cultural values for peace.

During this year's national day celebrations after so many years, Kiribati for the first time in history successfully reunited all faith-based organisations to gather again as one family under one roof, to worship God. All Christian denominations including the Baha'i Faith and Islam followers in Kiribati rejoiced in songs of praise and in richness of prayers.

During this worship it was heartening to be in the atmosphere where one can truly feel the grace, peace and love of God. Also, recognizing the greater humility of being an I-Kiribati is far more effective in sustaining peace rather than the differences in faith. We invite the rest of the world to follow this example.

As part of our commitment to global peace, my government is working closely with the UN to engage our police in the UN Peacekeeping Missions with the support of various partners. We will commit to support gender balance, in recognition of Kiribati's ongoing commitment to equal representation and opportunities. In addition, Kiribati has strengthened its policies and laws to support and empower women and girls, people with disabilities, elders, unemployed, youth and children.

Mr. President,

We must recall our commitments under our UN Charter, to build a safe, peaceful and secure home for our peoples, individually as sovereign nations, and collectively as members of our United Nations. In Kiribati, we strongly believe that this is deeply threatened and undermined by the continued existence of nuclear weapons, the discharge of nuclear treated water and leak of radioactive materials into the Blue Pacific Ocean. The existence of nuclear weapons also diminishes trust in our UN Family members on their commitment to peace and stability, if they continue to manufacture and possess nuclear weapons.

Kiribati will continue promoting the non-proliferation and ultimately the total elimination of nuclear weapons to our United Nations, in particular our obligations in keeping our region, our land, our upper airspace and ocean free of environmental destruction and pollution with radioactive wastes and other materials including plastics. Most importantly, is the health of our people especially those who were exposed to the nuclear test blasts on Christmas Island, and those whose ancestral land have been exploited leaving pinnacles behind. Compensations must be made to those on Christmas Island including the Banaban people affected by environmental degradation to rebuild trust.

One of the global challenges and grave concerns that impacts our lives and future is corruption. The Government recognises that fighting corruption is critical to achieving sustainable development, and accordingly hosted the first ever regional Anti-Corruption Conference for Pacific Leaders in 2020.

The outcome of this conference, Teieniwa Vision, reaffirms the Pacific unity against corruption as well as integrating good governance principles

into their broader developmental agenda. At the international level, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, along with the General Assembly, can lead the way by ensuring that anti-corruption efforts are prioritized in our pursuit of global sustainable development with SDG 16 as our guidepost.

Enhancing Prosperity

Mr. President,

Enhancing prosperity is essential for sustaining peace and so the government is dedicated to people-centric principles, placing citizens at the center of our decisions and services, and promoting transparent governance. We value continuous learning and capacity development for a competent public service to deliver on development goals. Building capacity and transfer of knowledge to enhance the capability of our people is sustainable. This allows our people to take ownership of our own national processes and procedures, thus guiding our own development. We acknowledge the support of our development partners which needs to be well coordinated and harmonized to ensure fair and inclusive distribution and allocation of limited resources amongst competing needs.

We are committed to expanding access to overseas labour markets, providing decent work conditions, and adhering to international labour standards. In education, we invest in our young generation and educators, support accessible, well-resourced schools for quality learning environments, and ensure equal access to high-quality education at all levels to nurture our people and advance our nation forward.

Accelerating Progress towards our SDGs

Mr. President,

In our pursuit of SDG acceleration, Kiribati is faced with significant challenges due to its geographical isolation, scatteredness of its islands within its 3.5 million square kilometers Economic Exclusive Zone and vulnerability to climate change to name a few. Encountered with these significant challenges, delivery of essential services such as education, health, security including implementation of activities related to achieving SDGs in Kiribati is very costly. We should be given increased access to financial resources to obtain equipment, infrastructure and others to achieve SDGs and at the same time develop our country. This includes an urgent call to scale up global financial resources and simplifying guidelines to allow easy access. Achieving these, guarantees Kiribati, to be placed in a better position to sustain peace and harmony.

With a vast ocean and airspace, Kiribati's resources are central to our survival, development and security. To harness our ocean resources sustainably, we need financial assistance and access to the right capabilities, technology and equipment. Likewise, the management of our airspace is important for security purposes. This will enable us to effectively manage our maritime domain and airspace, ensuring responsible utilization while protecting our fragile ecosystem.

At the forefront of climate change, Kiribati is experiencing intensifying severe drought and coastal inundation affecting homes, public infrastructure, food and water security. The projected cost for adaptation has significantly increased therefore developed countries are urged to put more funds beyond the global pledge agreed to in Paris. This would also finance the loss and damage and facilitate investment in early warning

systems and forecast. With that said, this would help our people adapt to the changing environmental conditions and to build resilience in our communities.

Sustainability for all

Mr. President,

Sustainability has become the new governance imperative, which needs to be clearly understood. As leaders of today, it is vital to know exactly what we want to sustain, at what scale and be wary of the implications. This will require us to be more diligent, patient and hard working with sheer determination, so sustainability of resources, efforts and time is optimally maximized for the betterment of all.

In conclusion, let's embrace our traditional blessings of Te Mauri, Te Raoi, ao Te Tabomoa, which literally means Health, Peace, and Prosperity).

Thank you.