



REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY TE BERETITENTI (PRESIDENT) ANOTE TONG,

2015 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT

25 SEPTEMBER 2015

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Mr President;
Excellencies
The Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon
Distinguished delegates;
Ladies and gentlemen

It is an honour and a privilege to address this historic Summit on behalf of the Government and people of Kiribati. In Kiribati we begin all formal events such as this by conferring blessings on all. I therefore wish to begin by sharing with you all our traditional Kiribati blessing of:

KAM NA BANE NI MAURI...meaning may you all be blessed with peace and security

Mr President,

Today marks a truly momentous occasion as we representatives of our people from all corners of the globe gather to adopt an ambitious sustainable development agenda for our respective peoples for the next 15 years.

At the outset I wish to commend the sterling leadership and commitment of our Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for steering our family of nations forward and in pushing ambition to achieve sustainable development for all. I also wish to congratulate you Mr President on your elections to preside over this historic summit and in assuming the Presidency of the 70th session of the General Assembly, the first year of implementing this new development agenda. I assure you Mr President of our full support and cooperation from Kiribati.

I also wish to commend your predecessor, the President of the 69th Session, H.E. Sam Kutesa for his leadership in guiding the massive task of shaping this new agenda before us. I would in particular like to specially commend the co-facilitators

Ambassadors Kamau and Donoghue for their outstanding leadership and in presiding over the lengthy work of the Open-Working Group and the Intergovernmental negotiations, a massive, inclusive and consultative process over more than two years. Congratulations to you and to all for a job well done.

Mr President

This is truly a major multilateral achievement as we celebrate the 70th year of the United Nations. As we celebrate, we should also reflect and ensure that this premium global body remains responsive to the needs of the most fragile and vulnerable of people in its membership. This is the real litmus test for the organization's relevance. This new agenda, that we are adopting at this Summit presents an Agenda of Hope for humanity, an agenda underpinned by the overall goal of eliminating poverty and the key theme of "leaving no-one behind." An agenda that can ensure no-one is left behind.

Mr President

Some critics are already out with a verdict even before the adoption of this new agenda saying there are just too many goals and targets. There will always be critics...and who knows that better than we the politicians. But the truth of the matter is this, these goals reflect the realities and the multitude of challenges facing humanity across the globe today. If we were to ask the question "what are the root causes of the violent conflicts around the globe causing tens of thousands of senseless loss of lives, the mass movement of refugees now experienced in Europe, the emergence of fundamentalist terrorist groups around the world, the change in our climate system..." Much of the answers to these questions can be found in the lack of attention to the goals in front of us in the new agenda. These goals are not new. Most, if not all are in our national development plans and strategies. What is new is the global call for the international community and national governments to do things differently to effect transformational changes necessary to achieve what we politicians promise our people every time election

time comes around... prosperous, peaceful, just and equitable societies that will benefit all. This is crucial in an increasing interdependent world where decisions made and action done in one country will have rippling effects elsewhere in other countries.

Mr President

We welcome this new development agenda. For us in Kiribati, it is timely for us as we finalise our own national development plan for the next 5 years; But in adopting the new agenda, we must not leave the unfinished business of the MDGs behind in taking on the new agenda. Many countries including Kiribati have not had a strong score card on the implementation of the MDG, for a reason. We, like all SIDS, face major challenges in our development efforts, well documented and which I will not repeat here. These challenges are further compounded by climate change.

Mr President,

Let me therefore focus on the one key goal for us, in this agenda, **Goal 13: The need to take urgent action to combat the effects of climate change**, particularly important for low-lying countries like mine who are now experiencing these impacts. I do so Mr President as climate change poses an existential challenge for my people and this one goal, if not given urgent attention now, is one that has the potential to negate all efforts towards sustainable development.

Mr President

My people live on low lying atoll islands no higher than 3 meters above sea level. With the changes in our climate system, and with sea level rise, our islands are now facing major challenges never faced before in our history. We have experienced climate extremes not only from sea level rise but by disaster events

such as Cyclone Pam which hit Vanuatu and other low lying Pacific island, mine included, earlier this year followed soon after by Typhoons Maysak and Dolphin.

Mr President

King tides combined with strong winds, wrecked havoc to our islands, our homes, our villages and our people. What is alarming is the increasing frequency and severity of such events to us. In some parts of the country, whole villages have had to relocate due to severe coastal erosion and flooding. Food crops have been destroyed and the fresh water lens, our major source of drinking water are increasingly being contaminated by the intruding sea water. Our people are worried as they watch these events grow in intensity. The most vulnerable are the already vulnerable, women, children, the disabled, the sick and the aged.

Mr President

All these events have and will continue to put pressure on our already stressed national systems and limited national resources. For us and other low lying atoll countries like Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Maldives and Tokelau, as well as the millions of humanity living in coastal areas in the Pacific and around the globe, we have to address the critical and pressing "here and now" challenges from climate change first, before we can even begin to talk of sustainable development or a new development agenda.

Mr President

The first real test of our commitment to this new development agenda will be the Paris Climate Summit. The new Development Agenda will mean nothing if the Paris Climate Summit in December does not come up with an ambitious legally binding agreement that can address this urgent challenge for those on the frontline of climate change and cannot halt global warming and save humanity.

Mr President

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, on philanthropy on private businesses to assist those on the frontline of the climate calamity 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. Let us call on those with the ability to assist and who have a contribution to make, to join in the global dialogue and more importantly, urgent action to address this major challenge.

Mr President

“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. The challenge of climate change demands that we must think outside the bounds of conventional thinking, outside of the norm because these are extraordinary challenges which call for extraordinary and unconventional solutions.

We need to take bold steps even if we are not sure they are the right ones. If necessary we can improvise on the way. But whatever we do, we cannot afford to be paralysed into inaction simply because of the apparent impossibility of the challenge confronting us. Time is running out. And the current alternatives are not acceptable.

Mr President

It is most gratifying to note that there is an emerging glimmer of hope; that there is a “shift in the wind” in the dialogue on climate change. We welcome His Holiness,

Pope Francis's voice on climate change, we welcome the messages and expressions of commitment from a growing number of quarters, from more capitals around the globe, and from civil society, recognising climate change as posing a major challenge and requiring urgent action. We from the frontline nations welcome this most gratifying "shift" as a very positive development in the right direction, that the international community has at last heard our messages and our shared stories of the plight of our people.

But Mr President, hearing our story and recognising that climate change is a major challenge is not enough, we need to act on it with urgency. We may be on the frontline now, but so are the millions of people around the world living in low lying areas who are just as vulnerable. So are the millions of others facing prolonged droughts, higher temperatures, and melting glaciers. For them, like us, sustainable development and this new agenda will not mean anything, if the global community does not step up, and step up substantially, efforts to combat climate change.

Mr President

We on the frontline of the climate calamity will do our part. In Kiribati we have adopted a multipronged strategy to ensure the survival of our people. We have bought land offshore. We have looked at floating and artificial islands and options for raising our islands from their current height to maintain heights above the predicted sea-level rises.

We are reconciled to the reality that whatever measures we take to remain above the rising seas and more severe weather conditions, our islands will not be able to accommodate the current level of population for we do not have the scale of resources required to raise all our islands and it does not seem likely that the level of resources needed will be forthcoming - not unless there is a radical change in global thinking and commitment. We have therefore embarked on major education

reforms programme with skills upgrading for our people in line with our program of migration with dignity.

But we cannot do it alone. It needs to be a collective global effort. We call for new and accessible financial resources to assist the most vulnerable to adapt and build resilience to climate change. Whilst it is commendable that there have been significant pledges for the Green Climate Fund, there remains the challenge of accessibility and the translation of these pledges into what and to where it matters the most. We welcome the assistance by the various agencies with the capacity to provide the needed conduit but it is equally important that such assistance does not get eroded in the process.

Mr President

We must believe that as we endorse this new sustainable development agenda and as we celebrate the 70th Anniversary of this United Family of Nations, no member nation should be in a position where they have to plan on their own for a time when their people will no longer have a country and a place they can call home. It will not do simply to say and acknowledge that climate change is an existential challenge. It is about our response to it as a global community of moral human beings.

Mr President

The real test of the effectiveness and relevance of the new Sustainable Development Agenda that we are adopting at this Summit and indeed of the United Family of Nations as it celebrate its 70th Anniversary, is in ensuring that no-one is left behind. Yet, my people and those on the frontline of climate change, face the real possibility of being left behind.

I therefore call on this Summit, and the 70 UNGA, to lend their support to the voice of the most vulnerable and call on the international community for an ambitious legally binding agreement that can begin to heal our one shared home and planet.

I also call on this Summit to join our voice to ensure that the agreement in Paris must include a special mechanism to fast track urgent assistance for those countries in the frontline of climate change who need urgent assistance NOW.

Mr President

It is no longer about who is to blame and what caused our climate system to change? It is about urgently working together, within our capabilities, as good global citizens to urgently address a major challenge to all people and to our one and only home...our Planet Earth.

Mr President

Let me conclude by sharing with you all our traditional Kiribati blessings of **Te Mauri, Te Raoi, ao Te Tabomoa**. May health peace and prosperity be with us all.

Thank you.