



REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

Statement

By

His Excellency Taneti Maamau

President of the Republic of Kiribati

The General Debate of the 72nd Session of the

United Nations General Assembly

Friday, 22nd September 2017

(Check against delivery)

Mr. President
Secretary General Antonio Guterres
Excellencies
Heads of delegations
Distinguished delegates
Secretariat team
Observers
Members of civil society and private sector
Members of the media
Ladies and gentlemen

I bring warm greetings from the Government and the people of the Republic of Kiribati on whose behalf I am very honored and humbled to address this august gathering. In our traditional way and in the Lord's name, I share with you blessings and peace.

Kam na bane ni mauri!

Acknowledgement

Mr. President

I join previous speakers in congratulating you on your election to the presidency of the 72nd Session of the General Assembly. You have an important responsibility to chart and lead the course of our work during this Session. I am confident that under your able leadership we will achieve the goals and targets set for this Session based on the theme "*Focusing on People: Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet*". Please be assured of our full support and cooperation.

I also join others in commending and acknowledging with gratitude and pride the marvelous leadership of your predecessor and our Pacific brother, His Excellency Ambassador Peter Thomson of Fiji.

Mr. President

As this is our new Secretary General's first General Debate, I extend to him our heartfelt congratulations on assuming leadership of our organisation and acknowledgement of his unwavering commitment in reforming our organization to make it more inclusive and responsive to global realities facing its members.

Highlight on the Theme

Mr. President

I congratulate you on the theme you have chosen for this Session. It serves as a reminder to us of two of the great wonders of creation: our people; and our planet.

People are the fundamental foundations of our families, our societies, our nations and our planet bound together by strong human values and a strong faith in God. The theme reminds us of our important responsibility, as leaders, to ensure that human lives, human dignity and human values prevail over dollar value. We must make sure we serve and deliver on our main objective as a global family to provide a peaceful and secure world, without nuclear weapons, and to promote social progress, better living standards, human rights and dignity for all our citizens. We all want to live a happy life on a safe and sustainable planet.

Our People

Mr. President

As leaders of our sovereign nations, we are responsible to our people who are at the heart of our sustainable development agenda. Every year, we converge in this great Hall from all corners of our planet to represent their voice – to share their triumphs, their tribulations, and to share our vision for them and for our planet. The voice we represent at this august gathering is constant and dominated by messages of trials and challenges at varying degrees of urgency and intensity.

Over the past years, we continue to witness human suffering around the world as a result of armed conflicts, terrorism, persecution, corruption, climate change and natural disaster, to name a few. Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed, through the media, heartbreaking news of loss of lives and extensive devastation in the Caribbean, Mexico and the United States caused by unprecedented continuous onslaught of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Jose and Maria as well as earthquakes. While it wasn't as widely reported as the Hurricanes and earthquake in the Americas, the intense typhoons and monsoons in Asia also caused great human suffering and loss.

On behalf of the people and Government of Kiribati, I offer our heartfelt condolences and our prayers to all victims of these natural tragedies as they try to rebuild their lives after the loss of their loved ones and their homes.

Mr. President

While we deal with human suffering in countries affected by rapid onset disasters, we must not forget the plight of those, like people in Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands and the Maldives and other Small Island Developing States, who continue to suffer on a daily basis from the impact of the slow onset climate disaster. This may not capture the attention of the global community due to its slow impact and limited media attention but it is causing pain and suffering in our communities.

During this 72nd Session and in view of our theme, the United Nations must focus on the most vulnerable and underprivileged members of our global family such as the least developed countries and Small Island Developing States. We must provide them with special attention and support to achieve self-sufficiency and enjoy decent and dignified lives. We must make sure they are not left behind in our global journey towards achieving the Global Development Agenda. We must provide a platform on which they can participate meaningfully in international processes that affect their lives. We must make sure their voices are heard.

Mr. President

International processes and systems must be simplified and streamlined to enable enhanced participation and easy access to global resources like the Green Climate Fund. Above all else, human lives and dignity must be protected. We must celebrate and build on the diversity of our people, our rich cultures and values. We must respect each other. We must work together to overcome global challenges and unlock global potential.

Mr. President

Like you, Kiribati also looks forward to a day when we have to tell a different story to our children, and their children's children. A story without heartbreaking human suffering and loss. A story of success and joy. This story must start with major transformation of our homes, our societies, our nations and our world but most importantly, the imminent transformation of our hearts, and our minds, both as leaders and as individuals.

My Government is embarking on an ambitious transformative 20-year Vision for Kiribati (KV20) towards a wealthy, healthy and secure nation based on accelerated growth and strategic investment in our human, natural and cultural capital. Our

priority sectors in the immediate term are fisheries and tourism with anticipated boost in our national income levels to help finance our development priorities. The KV20 is underpinned by the principles of good governance and transparency.

Our intervention is targeted at empowering our people at the household and community levels. They are the foundation on which our nation is founded. The stronger the foundation the more resilient and more self-sufficient our nation. My Government has put in place income generation programmes to boost household income levels to address poverty in our society and provide an opportunity for a decent and dignified life for our people.

Our Government policy slogan is to serve and deliver to our people based on the principles of good governance and transparency.. We have established a Parliamentary Select Committee on Anti-Corruption. We have enacted a Leadership Code and put in place necessary regulations and arrangements for the establishment of a Leadership Commission next year. Before I left Kiribati earlier this week, I launched our first ever National Anti-Corruption Strategy covering the public sector, the private sector and civil society.

Nurturing and developing a decent life for all require genuine and inclusive partnership. We cannot talk about focusing on people and creating a decent life for all if our United Nations family is incomplete. Every year, we pledge to consolidate and act together to provide a better life for our people, yet we choose to ignore the 23 million people in Taiwan and deprive them of the right to be part of this global family and to participate and contribute meaningfully to the sustainable development agenda. We call for a reform programme that will see Taiwan included in our global family's efforts and drive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our Planet

Mr. President

Our planet is struggling to keep up with our greed and demand on it. We are stretching our planet's capacity to dangerous limits. Continuing with unsustainable patterns of production and consumption will push our planet's life support system to the brink of collapse. The warning signs of unprecedented natural events causing despair and havoc in their wake is confirmation of the poor health of our planet.

With lessons learned from the damage we caused on our atmosphere, we must ensure that urgent and collective action for conservation of our ocean is made so that we do not repeat the same mistake we made with our atmosphere. I am encouraged to note item 78 on the agenda of the General Assembly which proposes the formulation of an internationally legally binding instrument for the management and sustainable use of biological marine diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. This is crucial for Kiribati and other countries which rely heavily on revenue from fisheries. A single management failure in any such area or in any other part of the ocean could have devastating consequences not only on the fisheries of a nearby EEZ area but potentially on the fisheries of the entire ocean. The fishing revenue accounts for about 80% of our recurrent budget. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of this issue with an ambitious vision that 20 years from now, Kiribati aspires to implement a self-reliance strategy to harvest, process and market its own tuna.

Ocean has a strong connection to the people, peace and prosperity. Kiribati has played its part in the conservation and management of the ocean by declaring 11% of its total Exclusive Economic Zone as a Marine Protected Area, a non-commercial zone and a world heritage entity under UNESCO with an aim to allow a re-stocking of fisheries resources for the future. We have also declared our entire EEZ as a shark sanctuary. If a small resource-constraint nation like mine is willing to make a

profound sacrifice of its own economy and a resource to the entire world that its people rely on every day for a living, indeed this global family have a far greater capacity to do more and make sacrifices that focus on people so that our children and their children can build a decent life in a sustainable environment.

Our Response

Mr. President

In spite of all these challenges, we remain steadfast in our strong development aspirations and vision for our people. We require swift global action on climate change. We require support to mitigate and alleviate the suffering of our people. We are grateful for the support of all our development partners in our efforts to address the impact of climate change on our people, in areas such as water and sanitation, and coastal protection of our water resources, our critical public infrastructure and farmland.

Access to climate financing, like the Green Climate Fund, takes too long to process and disburse. The longer the delay in delivering this much needed financing for urgent adaptation, the greater the impact on our people and environment, and the higher the cost.

We simply cannot afford to wait any longer.

As part of my Government's 20-year vision for Kiribati (KV20), we have decided to take charge of our fate and put in place innovative financing modalities. This will allow us to fast-track financing support for our sustainable development agenda, especially in relation to climate change and disaster risk reduction.

With the approval of Parliament, my Government is leveraging our sovereign wealth fund as collateral for concessional debt financing. Ideally, Government will be looking at concessional debt financing with an interest rate of 1% to 2% which will be repaid when climate or adaptation financing are available. We currently earn about 6% return on our investment.

This is a move beyond tradition but we would rather take the initiative to drive our own aspirations and deliver to our people than to wait on financial assistance that may come at a moment far too late. Humanity and life must and should not be succumbed to the bureaucratic processes of financial institutions.

Concluding Remarks

As leaders of this global family, we have a moral responsibility to focus on the people we serve, strive for peace and decent life for all and make sure the health of the planet is sustained to continue to support life.

In our quest for sustainable development, we often focus on the economic fundamentals at the expense of human values. For so long, our focus has been diverted from the very purpose of this global family to our individual fight and quest for power, dominance and greed. In the process, we fail to recognize that for some members of this global family, their priority is simply to survive and provide a decent life and future for their children.

The compassion and love that exist within all of us can easily transform our global challenges by focusing on the most vulnerable members of our global family. We contemplate on how we can best find solutions when all we really need is to translate the meaning of family into what it stands for – love, compassion, respect, understanding and kindness. These are priceless solutions to the mounting problems that we continue to battle. We come at this gathering to listen and

converse, and let us do so with greater compassion, understanding, love, respect and kindness. It is never too late to start.

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

Kam bati n rabwa, thank you very much and God bless all our people, God bless our UN leadership and family and God bless our planet.