



REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

Statement

by

His Excellency Anote Tong

Beretitenti (President)

of the Republic of Kiribati

at the 59th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Tuesday 28 September 2004

(Check Against Delivery)

Mr. President,

I bring warm greetings from the Government and people of Kiribati on whose behalf I have the honour to address this august assembly.

At the outset I wish to extend our congratulations to you, Mr. President on your election to the Presidency of the 59th Session of the UN General Assembly. We have every confidence in your able leadership to guide the work of the Assembly and to deliver constructive outcomes. You have our full support and cooperation in your work.

I wish also to thank your predecessor, H.E. Mr. Hunte, for the excellent work he had done in steering the work of this Assembly during the past year.

My congratulations also to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his sterling leadership of our organization during these trying times, and for rising commendably to the challenges.

The Challenges

Mr. President,

We gather again this year, against the reality of daunting challenges that continue to confront us as individual nations and as a global community.

The on-going conflict in Iraq and other parts of the world, the scourge of terrorism and the existence of nuclear arsenals, accelerated environmental degradation and the threat of global warming and sea-level rise, hunger and poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other non-communicable diseases, the marginalisation of Least Developed Countries in the global economy and underdevelopment, continue to pose major challenges for our organization today. These challenges cast a dark shadow on the commitments made by world leaders at the Millennium Summit held here in New York four years ago, pledging to work collectively to maintain peace and security, to eliminate poverty and to promote development for the benefit of all mankind in the new millennium.

Security Challenges

Mr. President,

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons continue to threaten international security. We must be unified in our approach to addressing these challenges effectively through the strengthening of multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and agreements, and through closer regional and international cooperation. Kiribati is supportive of all non-proliferation efforts and in this respect is party to, among others, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

We commend and support the work of the international community and efforts taken at the national, regional and international levels to respond to the challenges of terrorism, recognizing the need for international solidarity in addressing this increasing global threat.

Kiribati is committed to the global fight against terrorism. Terrorism knows no boundaries and we, therefore, cannot claim immunity from it. Indeed, as a small island developing state we have little capacity to develop any effective counter measures and are therefore especially vulnerable to terrorism.

We acknowledge the importance of complying with UN Resolutions and international security arrangements that have been adopted in the fight against terrorism. While we cannot afford to be complacent in our efforts in this regard, it must be recognised that the compliance requirements for these resolutions and arrangements do pose enormous challenges for countries such as Kiribati. Our limited resources and technical capacity are already committed to providing for the basic and essential social and economic needs of our rapidly growing population thus placing severe constraints on our ability to progress compliance. Having said that I wish to note that, with technical assistance from our development partners, we have made progress in enacting some important legislation relating to terrorism and trans-national crime. We expect to make further progress on compliance with the counter-terrorism requirements shortly.

The progress made so far has revolved primarily around the introduction of legislation. We recognise that this is but the beginning of the process. The implementation and enforcement of the legislation enacted will pose an immense challenge. In this respect we will continue to count on the assistance and support available from the international community.

Climate Change and Sea-Level Rise

Mr President,

We note with deep regret and concern the loss of lives and devastation to property caused by the recent series of hurricanes in the Caribbean and Atlantic Coast of the United States.- We offer our deep sympathy to those affected by these natural disasters.

The adverse impact of Climate Change and Sea-level Rise are critical security issues for the global community in this new millennium, and more so, for low-lying island states like Kiribati. The issue must take centre stage along with other international security issues. We urge the international community to agree on a unified global response to better protect the environment, in the same way that the international community is being encouraged to respond to terrorism and other threats to global security.

Our inability as a global community to agree on a unified stand on Climate Change and Sea-Level Rise is most disappointing and we deplore the notion that economic growth must take precedence over environmental issues. Our very existence as a state is at stake if this thinking prevails.

I would like at this juncture to express our gratitude to the many countries that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol and to appeal to those that have not, to do so as a matter of urgency. We have demonstrated remarkable solidarity in the fight against global terrorism. Can we not demonstrate the same in the fight against Climate Change and Sea Level Rise?

Strengthened Cooperation

Mr President,

Regional cooperation has been a very effective mechanism in addressing the many challenges faced by countries in our region. Regional cooperation has enabled many Pacific countries to meet some of the counter-terrorism requirements. Regional cooperation has also enabled us to effectively address emerging issues confronting our region and the outstanding success of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is a clear demonstration of this.

We, in the Pacific, are confident of our ability to steer our course for the future. We have approved work to commence on a Pacific Plan that will promote collective action in the areas of security, good governance, economic growth and sustainable development. We envisage the Pacific Plan to result in the delivery of tangible benefits to our respective peoples and communities.

We recognize the need for and welcome strengthened cooperation and the development of closer linkages and partnerships between the UN and its specialized agencies and other Organizations, including the Pacific Islands Forum. Such linkages and partnerships can only result in a more effective, coordinated and harmonized delivery of assistance to member countries.

Development Challenges

Mr President,

Progressing the development aspirations of our peoples is a high priority, if not the highest, for many of us. Our national policy objective is to achieve the equitable distribution of development benefits to all our peoples based on the principles of good governance. We are committed to the UN Millennium Declaration and are on track in our national efforts at achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The MDGs have been integrated and mainstreamed into our National Development Strategy. We are committed to pursuing the MDGs as the basis of sustainable development. In this connection I wish to express our appreciation to all our development partners who have over the years contributed meaningfully to the realization of our development aspirations.

Mr President,

While grateful for the assistance extended by our development partners there is scope for us to achieve more for our peoples, and without need for development assistance. Kiribati has a large Exclusive Economic Zone that has an abundant fisheries resource. That resource is presently being harvested by vessels from Distant Water Fishing Nations under license arrangements. However, the return from these licensing arrangements, are negligible at only around 5 percent of the landed value of the catch.

Naturally we would like to see greater returns from this resource. Our ability to achieve sustainable economic development depends on it. Accordingly we encourage flag states of these fishing interests to encourage their industries to explore the mutual benefits to be gained from collaboration with resource owners in establishing on-shore facilities that will add value to the commodity. We believe that

such a model will also result in the easing of pressure on the fishing stock and will ensure conservation of the resource for the sustainable benefit of mankind.

The entry into force in June this year of the Western and Central Tuna Convention represents a major development in the management of the Western and Central Pacific Tuna Fishery.

Globalisation

Mr. President,

In this age of rapid globalisation, advances in information technology and trade liberalization, it is regrettable that while some are reaping the full benefits of these advances and developments, significantly more remain on the fringes. The reality is that a large proportion of the world's population, most of whom live in developing countries, continue to live in abject poverty, and are marginalized in trading arrangements and market access opportunities. The promise of globalisation and open trading as a positive force for economic growth and social progress continues to elude the many. Much work needs to be done to ensure the many also enjoy the benefits of globalisation.

Kiribati supports the findings of the Report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation. We urge that the findings of the Report be taken into consideration and incorporated into the work of the Assembly, especially for the High Level Review in 2005 of the Outcome of the Millennium Summit.

Barbados Programme of Action + 10

Mr. President,

We welcome the United Nation's support for the convening of the International Meeting early next year in Mauritius to review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Like other small island developing states, we attach great importance to the review. With the continued support and commitment of our development partners to the process, we can be assured of important outcomes that will go a long way in making a real difference to the quality of life for our peoples.

HIV/AIDS Pandemic

Mr President,

We share the concerns of the international community on the spread of HIV/AIDS and its devastating impact as both a health crisis and a development challenge. We welcome recent developments in the search for affordable drugs to HIV/AIDS victims in developing countries. We encourage greater collaboration on HIV/AIDS research and the mobilisation of resources for prevention activities and for better medical care for affected patients.

UN Reforms

Mr President,

We believe in the continuing relevance and importance of the role of the United Nations, and in its ability to respond to the challenges of our contemporary world. In

this regard, Kiribati welcomes and fully supports the efforts to reform this organization to enable it to better respond to the challenges in this era.

Given the crucial role of the Security Council in the promotion of international peace and security and the importance we attach to the issue, we see the necessity for Security Council reforms and the need to expand both permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council. Such an expansion is required to better reflect the realities of our world today. We note that some countries, including Japan, have consistently committed substantial resources towards the maintenance of global peace and security and we believe that they should be accorded permanent membership on the Security Council.

We attach great importance to our membership of this noble organization, and reaffirm our commitment to upholding the noble values and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. The UN Charter epitomizes hope for achieving justice and equality, and the safeguarding and promotion of fundamental human rights for all peoples. Within this context, we believe that the exclusionary principles applied to Taiwan in its bid for UN membership go against the very values and objectives of the UN Charter that we all strive to uphold.

In this era of tensions and conflict we should discard the present exclusionary practices and adopt a more embracing environment where all countries, willing and able to contribute to the international community's efforts to promote world peace and stability are welcomed as equal partners. Taiwan has made and continues to make notable contributions to the development of many developing countries, and has the capacity to contribute constructively to the good work of the United Nations. It is, therefore, regrettable that the desire of the 23 million people of Taiwan to again become a part of this global community of nations continues to be rejected.

Mr President,

The challenges that confront us at this point in time are indeed daunting. But they are not insurmountable. With renewed commitments and with a common resolve to work in close cooperation and in support of each other, we can succeed in creating a more secure, a more prosperous and a more just world for all in this millennium.

Thank you.