



# REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

Statement

by

the Vice President

of the Republic of Kiribati,

the Honourable Teima Onorio

at the 61<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly

**Tuesday 19 September 2006**

**(Check Against Delivery)**

Madam President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates

I bring to you all warm greetings from the President, Government and the people of the Republic of Kiribati on whose behalf I am honoured and privileged to address this august assembly this evening.

Allow me, Mr. President, to offer my heartiest congratulations on your election to the Presidency of the 61<sup>st</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly. I am confident that under your able stewardship this Session will successfully deliver constructive and productive outcomes that will benefit the membership. I wish also to offer my congratulations to your predecessor for his successful guidance of the work of the Assembly during the past year.

And may I also extend to our Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, my warmest congratulations for his sterling leadership of this organization during his tenure in office. We are indeed grateful for the excellent work he has done in navigating this organization through the challenges of the past decade. We wish him well in his future endeavours.

Madam President,

We continue to be confronted with major challenges. The challenges affect us each as individual countries and as members of the international community.

Peace and security in this world of ours remains elusive with the on-going conflicts and the threat of new conflicts around the world. Terrorism continues to plague us despite the best of concerted and collective efforts. Still more needs to be done to remove the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. And while some progress has been made towards addressing the threat posed by the continuing illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, further work is needed to eliminate this threat.

For the Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States the challenges of economic development remain at the forefront of our agendas. Marginalisation in the global economy is a feature common to many LDCs and SIDS. The record high price of oil has done little to ease the burden on our small economies.

In Kiribati, our remoteness and insularity, narrow economic base, small population size and high population growth rates are factors that we must contend with. We must also contend with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and tuberculosis, among others, which require the diversion of the already meagre resources we have at our disposal to finance our development.

Even with these daunting challenges we are forced to operate in an environment of uncertainty. I say uncertainty as our very survival as a nation and as a people with a distinct culture and way of life is being threatened by global warming and sea level rise.

Madam President,

These challenges are ones that we, as individual countries and as members of this collective body, need to continue to work together to address. For in this increasingly interdependent world of ours, ripples emanating from one part will ultimately reach out to touch the shores of others.

Madam President,

Consisting of low-lying coral atolls, Kiribati is particularly vulnerable to the impact of global warming and sea level rise. For countries such as Kiribati global warming and sea level rise are critical security issues.

While we welcome the support that has been forthcoming in developing adaptation strategies to these phenomena, there is a limit to how far we can adapt. As sea levels rise it will affect our ground water supply and gradually erode whatever land is available on our thirty three islands. Yes, we could always move inland to avoid the rising sea levels. But with our narrow islands if we move inland too far we risk falling into either the lagoon or the ocean.

We have and will continue to call on the international community to agree on a unified global response to these phenomena. We will continue to work with like-minded countries in pushing the case for a unified global response on this.

We have been disappointed with the lack of consensus on these critical environment issues. Indeed, we deplore the notion that economic growth should take precedence over environmental issues when the quest for that growth will threaten the very survival of some members of this organization.

Madam President,

Kiribati is a strong supporter of environmental conservation efforts. In this regard we have declared the establishment of the Phoenix Islands Protected Area which is recognized as the third largest marine protected area in the world. We are pleased to have been able to contribute to global environmental conservation efforts through this protected area. We are prepared to work with those willing and able to ensure the sustainability of this protected area.

Madam President,

We note the progress that has been made with regard to reforming the United Nations. Understandably, we would have liked to see greater progress having been made by now but we fully recognize the need for more discussions on the various issues.

And that is multilateralism in practice. The debate on unilateralism versus multilateralism in world affairs continues unabated. We see multilateralism in full play in the debate in reforming the UN. We consider this a reflection of the healthy interest each member country has in the organization. Indeed, in this day and age multilateralism would seem the more appropriate approach than unilateralism.

Madam President,

Consensus has yet to be reached on the reform of the Security Council. We note with interest the Report of the Working Group. While acknowledging the very strong interest in the issues raised and the need to forge a consensus, perhaps there is also need to consider how much more time is required to progress this.

Our position on the issue remains unchanged, i.e. those member states that are major contributors to UN programmes, especially towards the maintenance of global peace and security should be accorded permanent membership of the Security Council. In our view, Japan being such a member state qualifies for permanent membership of the Security Council.

Madam President,

Regional cooperation in the Pacific has been effective. Over the recent past we have had a number of examples of success in regional cooperative efforts. The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has made substantial contributions to securing peace and law and order in that country. Kiribati is pleased to have been able to contribute civilian Police personnel to RAMSI and we will continue to support the work of RAMSI as long as the people and Government of the Solomon Islands wish it to continue.

The Pacific Regional Assistance to Nauru (PRAN) has made positive contributions to Nauru. In view of our historical ties with Nauru we have worked closely with Nauru on a bilateral basis and remain committed to considering other options through which we may extend the collaboration.

Our Leaders will be meeting next month to discuss, among other things, progress on the Pacific Plan. We have been satisfied with the initial progress. The success or otherwise of the Pacific Plan will depend on a number of factors including the political commitment each member country accords to the Plan and to the Plan's ability to deliver tangible benefits, over and above that which is available on a bilateral basis, to its membership.

Madam President,

We extend our warm welcome to the Republic of Montenegro which has joined the membership of this organization this year. Montenegro's membership now brings to 192 the total membership in this organization.

The continuing desire by many to join this organization attests to the value and continued relevance of the United Nations.

I note, therefore, with much disappointment and regret that the desire of the 23 million people of Taiwan to join this organization of ours continues to be rejected. This is despite Taiwan's demonstrated ability, willingness and commitment to contribute to international collaborative efforts in the pursuit of global peace and security.

There has been much talk over the past years of good governance, of democratizing nations. Should we also not talk about adopting good governance in our multilateral organizations? Should we also not talk about democratizing our multilateral organizations?

We deplore this sad state of affairs that deliberately excludes a nation of 23 million people from participating as an equal member of the international community.

Madam President,

You have our full support as you carry out the duties of your office. We commit ourselves to working closely with you as we collectively seek to address the challenges that face us.

Allow me to close by conveying to you all our traditional blessings of te mauri (health), te raoi (peace) ao te tabomoa (and prosperity).

Thank you