



**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR BAARO,  
PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

Thank you Facilitator  
Your Excellencies  
Members of the Panel  
Ladies and gentlemen

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the President of the GA, H.E. Mr Sam Kutesa and the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan for convening this informal meeting to mark the 2015 Observance of the International Day against Nuclear Tests. I especially wish to express my appreciation for the opportunity to share our experience and our story relating to nuclear testing.

In 1962, my family spent time on our home island with my grandparents in a rural village in one of the outer islands in Kiribati. One evening, not long after sunset, there was a sudden flash of orange light that rushed up into a mushroom cloud high in the sky and then lit up the whole sky, bright orange.

There was a flurry of birds, most of which fell dead to the ground, and the villagers ran to the church next to my grandparents home loudly saying their "Hail Mary." My father knew what it was. He heard it on the only radio in the village. It was the nuclear test on Kiritimati (Christmas Island) which is more than 4,000 kilometres away. Fish died and floated to the surface of the water and we had a feast the next day.

A year later, I started school for the first time, one of my class mates had no teeth. She never had teeth. Another boy in the same class had patchy white and brown skin and was forever teased for this. Both my class mates had something in common; they were born on Kiritimati where their parents were when atmospheric tests were conducted between 1956 and 1962.

For half a century, from 1946 to 1996, more than 315 nuclear test explosions, atmospheric and underground, were carried out in our region, in my country Kiribati, in French Polynesia, and in the neighbouring Marshall Islands, covering our region with radioactive fallout and rendering entire atolls permanently uninhabitable.

In Kiribati, no studies have been done on the effects of these nuclear tests on our people, we do not have the medical facilities nor the capacity to do this. I spoke to an elderly mother with two disabled children born on Christmas Island in the late 50s. Her accepting explanation, said with a smile was "they were our children born during the testing time on Christmas Island." And that was it. For families, women and children alike were exposed to these tests.

In the nearby Marshall Islands, villagers living on nearby and downwind islands, as well as nuclear test site workers, suffered severely. The immediate health effects included skin burns, hair loss, finger discolouration, nausea, birth defects to children of families exposed to acute radiation poisoning.

Today, our communities still suffer from the long-term impacts of the tests, experiencing higher rates of cancer, particularly thyroid cancer, due to exposure to radiation. In some places, the environment and food sources remain highly contaminated although studies done by those who conducted these tests, have cleared these areas and indicated they are safe for us!

In Kiribati, when the tests ended, much of the equipment used for the testing were dumped in the ocean or just left behind. In seeking to have a study done on assessing the safety of Kiritimati Island from radiation, an offer was quickly made for a clean-up of the island, more than 30 years

after the tests, by one of the testing countries. Kiriitimati was deemed clean.

The question is; is it really clean?

With this history in mind, our region collectively has been most vocal on nuclear issues. In fact the very establishment of the Pacific Islands Forum in 1973, the annual gathering of our Pacific Leaders emanated from the frustration of not being able to discuss nuclear issues, deemed political by the metropolitan powers who were members, within the South Pacific Commission at that time, also the testers of the nuclear weapons.

Our region was the second permanently inhabited region in the world – after Latin America and the Caribbean – to secure for its people international legal protection from the dangers of nuclear weapons with the adoption of the Treaty of Rarotonga or the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty,

The Treaty was borne of our region's first-hand experience of nuclear-weapons testing. Indeed, the consequences of this testing are still being felt in very serious ways by the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands in French Polynesia and in my own country Kiribati although less documented.

Mr Facilitator, are we acceptable collateral damage to these decisions made elsewhere in Conference Rooms in capitals of larger countries supposedly for global peace and security?

Last week, the global community commemorated the end of the Second World War in the Asia and Pacific regions. Yet, so long as nuclear weapons exist, there is a very real danger that one day, these weapons of mass destruction will be used again, whether by design or accident. Halting the spread of nuclear weapons to other states or to non-state actors is not enough; we must also eliminate all existing nuclear weapons.

The total elimination of nuclear weapons is an essential part of our broader security, to protect our fragile environments for the benefit of all future

generations, and to reallocate the billions of much needed resources away from defence industries, and towards sustainable development efforts.

Mr Moderator, in two weeks time, our Leaders will be coming to New York to celebrate the historic 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations and to sign up to the Post 2015 Development Agenda for the global community, an agenda that is intended to be transformational and which promises to leave no one behind.

In a little over two months, our Leaders will then travel to Paris for the Climate Summit, COP 21 hopefully to sign up to an ambitious legal agreement to address the alarming changes to our climate system. Alarming to those of us in lowlying nations who are already experiencing existential challenges from sea level rise. And climate change, has rightly been labelled as another weapon of mass destruction.

Mr Chairman, how can we realistically talk of a post 2015 transformational and sustainable development agenda when we are battling the aftermath of wave after wave of decisions made in board rooms elsewhere in larger countries; when we have looming over us real and existential challenges from weapons of mass destruction. Our people have been left for collateral damage in the name of testing nuclear weapons for global security.

The potential for our people to continue to be left behind is a very real one unless urgent global action is taken to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction.

The real challenge for these United family of Nations, as we celebrate its 70<sup>th</sup> year since its inception is to demonstrate its relevance by ensuring that no nation, no people is left behind.

I thank you.