



REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

Statement by

His Excellency Anote Tong

President

of the Republic Of Kiribati

at the

**International Meeting for the
Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States**

Port Louis, Mauritius

Thursday, 13 January 2005

Mr. President
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to begin by congratulating you Mr President on your election as Chair of this distinguished International Meeting for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

I also would like to add the voice of my country and people in expressing our deepest sympathies to those who have lost so much in the aftermath of the recent earthquake and tsunami. Be assured that our thoughts and prayers are with those who have perished and their families who continue to search for explanations for such an apparently senseless act. I am however most heartened to witness the level of international conscience and humanity as demonstrated by the speedy and scale of assistance forthcoming. We thank and congratulate those who have been so generous.

Our purpose in coming together this week is to review what progress we have made in meeting the targets we set ourselves 10 years ago in Barbados. We believe that we fall well short of our promises, especially in those areas of greatest significance to small island states. It is clear that so much more could have been done, had there been real commitment behind those targets. Therefore unless we leave this meeting without having secured a real commitment from all nations to reinvigorate the implementation of the Program of Action, and unless in the years to come we see a more concerted global effort to honour that commitment, we will have wasted twenty years in verbal commitments.

Mr. President

We wish to acknowledge with gratitude the sustained efforts of our development partners over the years. But perhaps the time has come to explore the need for additional and innovative sources of finance. Greater foreign investment and mobilisation of private capital sources might provide an option. Unfortunately, given our extreme isolation, high costs and lack of institutional and physical infrastructure it has been difficult to attract serious foreign investment. Therefore in order for us to seriously consider such an option we need to overcome these obstacles. To do so we need to be able to offer more imaginative financing arrangements to potential investors. We hope that this is an area where our development partners may be able to participate.

Mr President

As a low lying island nation of water, we believe that at this point in time, our only hope for sustainable development lies in the optimisation of returns from our marine resources. Since recognition of coastal jurisdiction over the Exclusive Economic Zone we have had no choice but to allow foreign fishing vessels to harvest our fisheries resources at a token price of a few `cents in the dollar'. To test our sincerity about achieving sustainable development for small island states we now call on those countries and the international community to assist in the development of our capacity to enable us to take greater participation in the harvesting and processing of our fisheries resources. We believe that if thoroughly explored there are mutual gains to be made through joint venture or similar options. We also believe that increased returns to small island states from their fishing industry will ease the need for revenue from licence fees and contribute to more effective management of the fishery.

However, in order for these measures to be sustainable we need to boost our capacity to better manage our marine resources, for exploitation must be carried out in such a way that the generations to come can be assured of the means to sustain their future. To achieve this, we need to remain vigilant to protect against over exploitation. Our efforts, both regionally and internationally, such as through the formation of the Western and Central Pacific Tuna Commission, and nationally, such as through the development of marine protected areas, require the support of the international community.

We must also do all we can to protect the unique biodiversity of our islands, through such efforts as the Program of Work on Island Biodiversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity. This would ultimately help to promote the efforts to ensure food security and sustainable living. In addition, it is also important for us to continue to search for renewable and alternative sources of energy which are more affordable.

We also recognize the urgency to move forward with those outstanding and emerging issues that are vital to our sustainable development requirements.

Our future looks bleak in the face of climate change, climate variability and sea level rise. And all of our efforts towards sustainable development, all of what we have come here to discuss will have been wasted if our future generations can not be here to enjoy it. We regard these threats as very real. And as deliberate acts by some to secure benefits at the cost of others could only be compared to an act of terrorism — eco-terrorism if you wish. We have said it before, and we will continue to say it for as long as we are able to draw breath — the international community must take immediate and comprehensive action to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. Industrialised countries need to be more forthcoming in their commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

We call on those countries which have reaped benefits from the destruction of the environment to assist those who now have to pay the price of these irreversible processes. We believe such assistance must not be associated with mainstream development assistance as this is a binding commitment under the framework convention.

Mr. President

We would like to recall the commitment of the international community to the special case for small island developing states as first articulated in Agenda 21 and adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Our fragility and vulnerability have by no means diminished in the years since then and any suggestion of graduation would be a backward step. We believe that new issues have arisen which give us even greater cause for concern. The special case must therefore continue to be reiterated at every opportunity and we urge the international community to listen and to lend meaning to those words.

Mr. President

I would like to take this opportunity, through you in your capacity as Prime Minister, to express my gratitude and those of my delegation, to the Government and the people of the Republic of Mauritius for the courtesies and wonderful hospitality extended to us throughout our stay. We also thank the UN Secretariat and all those associated in the arrangements of a successful meeting for their tireless efforts.

In closing Mr. President I wish to reaffirm our genuine desire to achieve sustainable development and we believe this could only be made possible through sacrifice and goodwill. We implore you not to wait for another tsunami to strike or for some of us to pay the ultimate price before we can wake up to the reality that we all share the same planet.

Thank you