



STATEMENT BY H.E PRESIDENT ANOTE TONG
69th UNGA
New York, 26 September, 2014

Mr President;
Excellencies;
The Secretary-General;
Distinguished delegates;
Ladies and gentlemen

I bring to you all warm greetings from the people of Kiribati, on whose behalf I am privileged to once again address this august body. In my country we begin all formal addresses by conferring blessings of peace and good health on all present so I say:

KAM NA BANE NI MAURI

Mr President,

I echo the sentiments conveyed by previous speakers in congratulating you on assuming the Presidency of the 69th session of this General Assembly. I am confident that under your able stewardship, our organisation will continue its work towards improving the security and quality of life for all members of our global community, in particular those who are most vulnerable. Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge with appreciation the commendable leadership of your predecessor, His Excellency Mr John Ash for his stewardship over this past year.

Mr President,

I also wish to commend the unwavering commitment and hard work of our Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon who has served as an able navigator of our family ship, steering the United Nations through the diverse and complex realities and the myriad of challenges facing our peoples and nations around the world. In particular, I wish to commend his sterling leadership

and demonstrated personal commitment to the need to focus global attention on those who are most vulnerable and who are on the frontline of the many major challenges facing us today as a global community.

Mr President,

We meet at a critical time in the history of multilateralism. The global community is in the process of shaping a post 2015 development framework. We are hearing stronger calls for UN reforms, for a relook at the way we do things in our family of nations. The membership is calling for a move away from business as usual and is calling for transformational changes and we welcome the theme of this 69th Session as it aptly captures this call for changes by the membership.

Mr President

Earlier this week on Tuesday we concluded one of the most successful conferences convened by the Secretary General on Climate Change. We applaud the leadership and this very positive initiative by the Secretary General. For those of us in the frontline of impacts of climate change we welcome this renewed focus and the rallying by the UN membership behind the Secretary General's call for ambitious announcements and action. The real challenge is in translating these commitments and announcements to action.

Three weeks earlier, following the designation of the Year 2014 as the Year of SIDS by the United Nations, we hosted in our region, the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. The SIDS Conference has been declared by the UN and by those who attended as a resounding success, thanks to our gracious host, the Government and people of Samoa. We from the Pacific region share in the joy and pride of the people of Samoa in the successful hosting of this important Conference for small island developing countries and for the UN family of nations.

Mr President

These very successful conferences signify the UN and the UN membership's recognition of the need to highlight the special case of those in the frontline of sustainable development, to re-

focus global attention to the prevailing socio-economic and environmental challenges that continue to constrain efforts by SIDS to achieve sustainable development. This is particularly pertinent now as the international community is in the process of shaping the post 2015 Development Agenda.

The SAMOA Pathway provides a clear blueprint of how the SIDs want to move forward in their effort to achieve sustainable development. The real test of the success of the Samoa Conference though is in the adoption of outcomes into genuine and durable partnerships that can translate into activities on the ground which will have a positive impact on the lives of our people. While SIDS heard the plight of some of the most vulnerable, other UN processes are talking of graduation of these countries from LDC category. Where is the logic in this?

Mr President,

If we as a family of nations do not act and do not work in partnership with those in the frontline of major challenges, whatever they may be, then we will have failed. I would like to reiterate our deepest appreciation to you our Secretary General for your demonstrated commitment to and leadership in focusing UN and global attention to the plight of the most needy, to alleviate poverty, to address the ebola epidemic, to raise the voice and participation of youth and women in development, to end gender based violence, to promote peace and security and to act against climate change now.

Mr President,

Climate change- remains the biggest threat to mankind

As I have highlighted on numerous occasions, and as I did earlier this week, the issue of climate change remains the most single pressing challenge for us in Kiribati.

Climate change is an existential challenge for low-lying islands like mine Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, the Maldives and Tokelau and I again call for urgent global action to help these countries adapt and for international legally binding commitments to cut greenhouse emissions.

The global community cannot afford to NOT listen to our stories and the plight of our people. Our plight is the plight of the global community, further down the line.

Mr President,

Ladies and gentlemen, I have just come back from an Arctic Expedition to the North Pole and I am still overwhelmed today with what I witnessed with my own eyes. The melting of the massive sheets of ice in the Arctic region due to climate change will not only have severe impacts on the life of people in that region but will also result in the demise of future generations on other parts of the globe, in particular our most vulnerable atoll island nations. It has been an eye opener for me to spend time last week in the polar conditions. It gave me a wider perspective of the immensity of what is at stake beyond our own immediate concerns. This visit to the Arctic highlighted the stark reality of the very direct connection between the destruction of this polar region to what is happening to us in the equatorial region.

Mr President,

On Tuesday, we heard the voice of a very talented young woman, a poet from our part of the world from the Marshall Islands. Her voice represents the apprehension, the concern and the voice of mothers from low-lying countries like ours who lament what the future holds for their children and their children's children. For surely, we leaders and the mothers like Kathy and millions of others around the world, share or should share the same ultimate goal...to leave to our children and grandchildren a future that is better than what we inherited from our forefathers. We from Kiribati salute Kathy for reaching out and for touching the heart of leaders who heard her speak Kathy may you touch many many more hearts.

Mr President

The very sad reality is....WE ARE JUST NOT ON COURSE TO ACHIEVE THIS. It is glaringly obvious that we need to do things differently...we owe it to those we represent - Our People!

Mr President

For us climate change is not an event in the future. It's an event that we're dealing with today. We simply cannot talk of sustainable development without talking about climate change. Earlier this week, I appealed to fellow leaders and will do so again today, for all of us to work together against climate change and move towards binding international agreements towards a clean energy future, a healthier greener future for our children and a healthier greener home, for our one planet earth.

What are we doing...

Mr President,

We accept full responsibility for our own development to improve the well-being of our people into the future and we have and are determined to achieve this by finding national solutions to overcome the enormous development challenges that constrain our efforts.

My government has mainstreamed sustainable development principles into our national development plan, policies and strategies. Climate change and adaptation measures are integrated into our national budgeting process and development programs to strengthen disaster risk management. We have adopted an inclusive and a whole of Government and whole of nation approach towards addressing climate change impacts and towards strengthening our resilience.

Our “migration with dignity” strategy is an investment in the education of our people and the upskilling of our young population to equip them with educational qualifications and employable skills that would enable them to migrate with dignity to other countries voluntarily and in the worst case scenario, when our islands can no longer sustain human life.

Mr President,

Kiribati in July this year, initiated with other frontline low-lying atoll island states of Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, Maldives and Tokelau- the formation of a Coalition of low-lying Atoll Nations On Climate Change (CANCC –*can see*). The CANCC held their inaugural meeting in Tarawa in July this year and produced an outcome document that embraces the goals and vision of the Coalition about building resilience of our people in the face of climate change.

This initiative, Mr President, is spearheaded by the concerns we jointly share about the increasing severity of the challenges facing our people today from climate change and the slow pace of global action to address them. Our CANCC nations continue to support the on-going negotiations under the UNFCCC, but we also highlight that urgent action must be taken now to assist our countries and all vulnerable communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

The CANCC initiative demonstrates our political commitment and determination to find innovative solutions to the threats we face from climate change. We are looking at building up

our low islands, climate proofing our infrastructure, and our development efforts, at preparing and building the resilience of our people in the face of this major challenge.

Mr President,

We cannot do this alone and we acknowledge the support of our development partners and regional and international organisations that have assisted us and continue to support our efforts to address the challenge of climate change. However, much, much more remains to be done, including the need to make climate financing facilities more accessible and flexible as solutions and options to this challenge varies from nation to nation

Our Oceans, Our Future

Mr President,

The Ocean plays a pivotal role in the sustainable development of my country. Our vision for achieving sustainable development hinges on the blue economy, on the conservation and sustainable management of our marine and ocean resources. While we in Kiribati have been labeled a Small Island Developing State, we are in fact a Large Ocean State spanning an ocean area of 3.5 million square kilometers.

The ocean has been an integral part of our life since time immemorial, and while it poses a serious threat to our survival now from sea-level rise, it also provide immense opportunities, not only as a source of daily sustenance, but also as a means through which we can realize sustainable development and achieve sustainable livelihoods for our people.

Our EEZ is one of the largest in the world, and is home to abundant tuna resources which provides rich fishing grounds for Distant Water Fishing Nations. It is estimated that annual total landed value of the Fisheries Industry in our EEZ is approximately US\$4 billion annually. Yet only 5-8% of this come to us as resource owners, through licensing fees. We have to ask, where is the equity and fairness in this?

Mr President,

There is a need to re-look at and restructure the nature of private and public partnerships in industries like fisheries. A more equitable partnership that is based on mutual respect, good-will,

fairness and accountability will go a long way in providing an enabling environment for sustainable development to take place.

Mr President,

My government is working to maximize the returns from our large fisheries resource through value adding fisheries development, including on-shore processing. Our limited capacity in terms of capital, technical know-how, lack of infrastructure, distance from commercial and trade centres and air and sea transport challenges, stand in our way to advancing this development aspiration. Direct foreign investment and genuine partnership is therefore a way forward in this regard, and I am confident that such partnership, forged around equitable distribution of gains, will be the development model going forward. !

Sacrifice

Mr President,

Human activities have been responsible for the accelerated degradation of our global environment in the pursuit of short-term economic gains without due regard to the health of our oceans and our environment. Never in human history has the health of our oceans and planet earth been so much challenged! We all have a shared responsibility and obligation towards the protection of the ocean and the sustainable management of its rich bio-diversity from further detrimental degradation!

My country recognizes this shared responsibility and in 2008, established the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) in partnership with Conservation International and New England Aquarium. The PIPA marine protected area has been inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. In January 2015, we are completely closing off the Phoenix Islands Protected Area from all commercial fishing in an area of more than 410,000 square kilometers, representing 11% of our total EEZ, about the size of the State of California

PIPA is a rich fishing ground so its total closure on 31 December this year would entail loss of much needed revenue for Kiribati from fishing license fees. For us it is a major but necessary

short term sacrifice for the long term health of our ocean and for sustaining fish stocks for global food security. It demonstrates Kiribati's political commitment to the importance of marine conservation and the sustainable management of marine resources. It is our contribution to humanity and the common good of all. But the announcement of complete closure of this vast marine protected area will amount to nothing without monitoring and enforcement.

We have therefore established a PIPA Trust Fund to support our national efforts in the management of PIPA and in the monitoring of this vast marine protected closed area. We thank those who share our vision and have contributed to this fund. We encourage our partners who have not done so to partner with us in this massive undertaking.

Mr President

Call for greater global leadership and commitment

Excellencies, the challenges we face in the 21st Century have taken on a new dimension. It is no longer a fight to save a species here and a collapsed stock there. The fight has become larger, and is now about how to ensure the survival of whole peoples, communities, villages, cities and nations. The whole ecosystems hang in the balance - ecosystems that provide us with the air we breathe, the water we drink and much of the food we eat. It is time to view our global development in a whole new way. It is time to change business as usual. Indeed, a paradigm shift and transformational development approaches are necessary, starting from within our own nations and moving out to regional and international multilateral processes, institutions and partnerships.

It is high time we recognize that the new challenges require that we draw on all the resources available to the global community. Development and global challenges do not belong to Governments only.

Let us bring in our youth, let us bring in our women, civil society, the private sector, our traditional institutions. Let us be inclusive. Let all who have a contribution to make, make it. We welcome the inclusion of Taiwan in international processes of the World Health Assembly and hope that this similar inclusive approach will prevail in respect of other international institutions and UN processes where Taiwan and all who can participate and contribute meaningfully for the good of humanity are brought in to do so.

Conclusion

Mr President, Excellencies,

In my country, even before the advent of climate change, the atoll environment is harsh and life on the low-lying atoll islands is difficult. We have always worked on the principal of working together, as part of a community, on the premise that some challenges will come which are larger than us...

The age old test of our resilience and our strength as a community, is defined by the wellbeing of the weakest member of our community. For us sustainable development must be inclusive! It requires sincerity, goodwill, respect and the willingness to move a little bit slower to assist and bring everyone on board, to move forward together.

These principles I would like to bring to the United Nations...that the pursuit of sustainable development and lasting peace and security calls for and require sacrifice. It requires inclusiveness. It requires collective decisive action. It also requires political commitment and political leadership from all of us for the time to act is NOW

On this note, I leave you with the traditional Kiribati blessing of Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa, (May Health, Peace and Prosperity) be with us all.

Thank you.