



KIRIBATI STATEMENT

Delivered by H.E Ambassador Teburoro Tito, Permanent Representative of Kiribati to the United Nations, UN WATER CONFERENCE, 22 - 24 March 2023

Co-Chairs (Netherlands & Tajikistan)

President of the 77th United Nations General Assembly

Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Distinguished Heads of Delegations, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am truly honored and deeply grateful for this opportunity to represent Kiribati at this historic UN Water Conference.

Kiribati welcomes the convening of the first United Nations Conference on “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018-2028 and acknowledges the significant leading role of the co-hosts, the Government of Tajikistan and the Netherlands.

We recognize with gratitude this opportunity to discuss something so fundamental to life and the survival of mankind – “WATER”. We are reminded by the UN that water does not only affect our health and well-being, but it is also vital for achieving the SDGs across UN member countries and sectors. Thus, collective commitment, cooperation, partnership and bold action at all levels are necessary for finding and implementing effective solutions for all water related challenges.

It is most gratifying to note that most world governments nowadays admit the reality of the challenge and re-commit themselves to collective action and cooperation.

The adage “Water is Life” cannot be overstated, Mr. President. We rely on water for drinking, washing, cleaning and farming. Climate In a low-lying atoll islands of Kiribati where people draw water for drinking, washing and farming from a thin layer of rainwater floating on the surface of a huge mass of underground brackish water, essentially shows that water is the most precious gift that every member of a family is expected to use well and sparingly. Children who are traditionally vested with the responsibility of collecting water on a daily basis from wells located some distance away from homes are quick to learn from very young age that water storage, conservation and hygiene are critical for the family’s life, health and wellbeing. So, people in Kiribati see water accessibility and hygiene not only as a basic human right but also a basic human responsibility. However, the substitution of the manual collection of well water with electrically powered pumps has brought about a new mindset over the use and conservation of water shifting the responsibility more and more towards the government resulting in greater misuse of water by the general population.

Climate Change and its increasing adverse impacts on water availability and potability over the world is certainly alarming. As an atoll nation, Kiribati is one of the most vulnerable to the problem of water shortage. We are indeed disturbed at the rate climate variability and rising sea-levels reduces water availability in our islands. King tides and storm surges easily inundate coastal areas contaminating drinking water. Prolonged droughts, especially during La Nina, worsen the problem. Compounding these is the urbanization issue in the capital island of South Tarawa where population growth and density are growing at an unsustainable rate. In June 2022, Kiribati officially issued a Declaration of Disaster due to a prolonged drought nationwide.

Our government introduced, in 2016, a 20-year Vision to transform Kiribati into a healthy, wealthy and peaceful nation. Under the Health Pillar of the Vision, access to safe water and improved sanitation is highlighted as key targets. Our direct mitigating measures include seawall construction, investments in rainwater catchment, desalination systems

and other technologies. As supporting and indirect measures, we bolster Climate Adaptation through a 'whole of government' approach and WASH awareness programs.

Waging a war on two fronts simultaneously, to address water issues and climate change, is no mean feat, especially for a small island nation like Kiribati which has very limited resources at its disposal. We are particularly ill-equipped for natural disasters, owing to our small economic scale, lack of adaptation and capacity. Yet, we recognize that if we are to achieve climate and development goals, water conservation must be at the core of our development and adaptation strategies.

Whilst it is commendable that there have been significant pledges and schemes of assistance to improve access to safe water, especially to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), we must admit that the existing arsenal against water scarcity is still insufficient. Given the gravity of the looming global water crisis, we must come together as a human family and learn from each other, and even consider learning from integrating the wisdom of the past, as we implement the Water Action Agenda that will be agreed at the end of this historic gathering.

Mr. President, in closing let me bestow upon this assembly the traditional Kiribati blessings of Te Mauri, Te Raoi, ao Te Tabomoa, meaning "health, peace and prosperity"
Thank you.