

**Our Co-Presidents, the Prime Minister of Fiji and the Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden,
Distinguished Leaders and Ministers
Excellencies
Friends and custodians of our Ocean
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Kam na bane ni Mauri!

At the outset, allow me to extend warm greetings from the President, Government and people of Kiribati who I am deeply honoured to represent at this first United Nations Ocean Conference.

We congratulate you, our Co-Presidents, the Governments of Fiji and Sweden for co-hosting this important event for all of us. The importance of the ocean cannot be over-emphasised and this theme for this conference: Our oceans, our future: partnering for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 is very fitting.

Life on Earth, humankind as well as all living things are in one way or another, touched by the ocean, through its resources, that tuna sandwich, sashimi or canned fish, the regulator of the air that we breathe, and provides sea lanes linking continents, countries, islands and communities. This highlights the importance of the ocean and why we should work together in partnership to ensure that the health of the ocean does not continue to deteriorate; that we reverse the current trend we are heading towards.

Kiribati, often referred to as a Small Island Developing State is actually a huge Ocean State with the second largest EEZ in the Pacific Ocean, 3.5 million square kilometres; the same size as India. The 33 islands of Kiribati with a total landmass of 811 square kilometers are scattered and surrounded by a mass of Ocean area which houses our only natural resource, the marine resources. Extent of our marine resources are delineated by maritime boundary which provides long-term security, rights and status for my country are threatened by sea-level rise, impacts of climate change. This legal un-certainty

creates insecurity calling for Kiribati along with other SIDs who are highly dependent on our ocean for resources, to have this matter recognised at the UN level. In face of climate change, Kiribati in the worse-case maybe stateless thus losing our identity. Ocean acidification, impact of climate change, is a real threat to our reefs and ocean. These are happening now, and will only get worse with time, as we see happening on the ground, and as science confirms.

We in Kiribati recognize that it is first and foremost our own responsibility; to take the leadership to address the challenges facing our people from climate change and the rising seas. Government has therefore adopted a 20 year vision which focuses on the fisheries and tourism sectors. We realise that we must scale up our development efforts in these areas and have committed to invest in our own limited resources to assist our people fast track transformational changes, for we just simply cannot afford to wait for funding delays from multilateral and bilateral sources. We need to move with urgency.

Co- Presidents, the truth of the matter though is this; **no-one can do it alone**. Neither should we expect countries like mine to do it alone if we are serious about the 2030 Agenda.

To achieve our vision, we call for strong and genuine partnerships in transfer of knowledge, know how, capacity building to assist with our challenging development efforts. In fact, we are one of the few members of this United family of nations, who will put to the test, the principle underlying the 2030 Agenda that no-one will be left behind.

Co- Presidents, our hopes as a nation for the future lie in the very Ocean that is now threatening our survival.

Our EEZ is among the world's largest and major fishing grounds for tuna; an important single resource for us which provides 80% of Government's revenue each year, and for the world contributing 25% of the global world demand in 2014.

Yet we struggle to obtain a suitable and equitable return from this crucial single resource for us.

We are concerned that distant water flag states that harvest our resources do not recognise our rights as a coastal state threatening the sustainability of fish stocks. We are concerned about Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing in our waters. IUU takes advantage of our constraints in surveillance over our large EEZ.

Co-Presidents, as an ocean people and as islanders, we have recognised since time immemorial, the importance of a healthy ocean. Traditionally we have a binding interdependent relationship with our ocean. In our local language, ocean is known by many names to describe the significance of this relationship. "Taari" or "marawa" which translated means brotherhood or deep –associated with love and respect, describing our true connection with the ocean. A brotherhood bond with deep love and respect for each other.

The Ocean is the foundation of our very existence and culture, it is connected with our traditional skills and values (navigational and fishing skills, values of mutual respect, responsible custodians and harvesting only what we need). Sadly, we have angered the ocean, disrespecting the important role it plays in our lives, by using it as a dumpsite, overharvesting its richness, increasing its level of acidity. Our call of action is to immediately restore this bond and harmony by respecting and restoring the health of our ocean. We urge this conference to act now.

We have begun doing this already. In 2016 we declared our whole ocean area, all 3.5 million square kilometres of our EEZ as a shark sanctuary banning all commercial fishing of sharks. We offered mankind a gift, the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) a Marine Protected Area that is over 11 % of our total EEZ, an area equivalent to the size of California as a spawning ground for tuna. We are currently scaling up these efforts and now moving towards the creation of Community and village based MPAs throughout the country. We are taking leadership in all this Co-Chairs.

If a resource challenged country like mine can take these drastic measures which means forfeiting much needed revenue over the short term, then just imagine what collective action and sacrifice can do to the health of our oceans, if we move collectively, all of us, large and small, together.

Co- Presidents, the announcement made not too far from where we meet today over the last few days in relation to exiting the Paris Agreement is not what we as a global family need. It is disappointing and most disheartening for us, as it should be for all. The responses to the announcement have presented some comfort.

We simply ask that in this increasingly interdependent world, we must work together, we must refrain from actions that will adversely affect others, and we must work in partnership, share and learn from each other as good global citizens to get everyone to move forward, together.

Co-Presidents, this conference presents a unique opportunity to work together to put things right for our ocean, our climate system and our future generations. Let us recommit to ensure successful implementation of this crucial SDG 14, including supporting an effective process for follow up and review. Let us all work together for the good of humankind. Our children and grandchildren expect no less.

Co- Presidents, I conclude by bestowing upon us all as we take this journey together, our traditional blessing, of Te Mauri, Te Raoi and Te Tabomoa. May Health Peace and Prosperity be with us all.