



**STATEMENT BY KIRIBATI TO THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE (1)
FOR THE SAMOA SIDS CONFERENCE**

24-27 February 2014. NY

Co-Chair

I wish to take the floor to share some thoughts from Kiribati on the issues under discussion. Before doing that I would like to preface my remarks by congratulating the Co-Chairs and members of the Bureau on their election to guide the work of the Preparatory Committee. We thank you for taking up this task on all our behalf and take this opportunity to assure you of the full support of the Kiribati Delegation to this important work.

Co-Chair

Kiribati associates itself with statements delivered yesterday by Bolivia on behalf of G77 and China; Nauru on behalf of AOSIS, PNG on behalf of PSIDS as well as the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum.

We thank the United Nations Secretary General for his sterling leadership and demonstrated personal support towards the special case and vulnerabilities of SIDS. The designation of the Year 2014 as the Year of SIDS – attests to the UN's recognition of the need to again highlight the special case of SIDS and provides the means to refocus global attention and focus of the international community to the prevailing socio-economic and environmental challenges that continue to constrain efforts by SIDS to achieve sustainable development.

Much work has been done in the past year by a SIDS-owned and led national, regional and inter-regional preparatory work that reviewed our past development implementation scorecard and identified the gaps and new and emerging challenges as well as setting our sustainable development priorities. These are clearly articulated in the Barbados Inter-Regional meeting outcome document, it

is SIDs owned must be respected and should serve as the basis for the way forward for the international community to join hands with SIDS in addressing them.

Co-Chairs

The very fact that we have had to refocus attention and revisit dialogue on the special vulnerabilities of SIDs does indicate glaringly that “business as usual” cannot be the way forward. Indeed a paradigm shift is required!...starting from within our own nations and moving out to regional and international multilateral processes, institutions and partnerships. We need to do some more thinking outside the box, focusing on innovative, integrated, tangible, targeted and implementable action on the ground that can have a positive impact on those who we are here to represent...OUR PEOPLE. This message is very clear in the Barbados SIDs Inter-regional document for the need for a paradigm shift in how we address sustainable development.

This includes within the United Nations and its agencies. To give an example, we are meeting here to prepare for the SIDS Conference in Apia, to refocus attention on the special vulnerabilities of SIDs. Amongst these SIDs, there are some more vulnerable than others including my own country, Kiribati which is also in the LDC category. Yet within the same Division of the UN a review process for graduation for Kiribati from the LDC category has already begun. Where is the logic in this? Let us move beyond economic statistics and focus on the people were here to represent and serve.

Co chair

The second point I wish to make is, to stress the URGENCY of action in the area of climate change. Climate change is the single most pressing challenge for us in Kiribati and we cannot meaningfully speak of sustainable development without addressing Climate change which is threatening the very survival of our people.

Yet when we listen to debate on Climate change, it is as if we are talking of a phenomena that will happen down the line sometime in the future. It is happening now for us. Climate change is posing urgent security challenges for the Small Island Developing States today. In my own country, we are in the front line

of all this. It is already causing loss of territory, severe coastal erosion, involuntary displacement of communities, decrease in food and water security, and more importantly, has become a survival issue. These impacts are putting enormous pressure on domestic institutions, the national budget and the sense of well being of the people. And it will get no better...these will continue to grow worse for the foreseeable future.

Co Chair

We are the early warning system, The UN and the international community, must take heed of what is happening in our countries, in Kiribati, in Tuvalu, in the Marshall Islands, in the Maldives, for what is happening in our countries is also happening in other SIDS, and in other parts of the globe, although not at the national scale we are facing. Most of the world's large cities are on coastal low-lying areas and they too will eventually face these security challenges caused by climate change. And the scope of the problem will only increase with time. The time to act is now.

Because of climate change, our future is uncertain. The UN promotes basic human rights and the right to a secure future? What secure future can we really talk about for the people in Kiribati? Climate change has raised a new dimension of human rights, the right to clean drinking water the right to survival.

Co-chair

Adaptation is important as it provides us with some short term solutions to help cope with the changes brought about by climate change. But how can we adapt to the already brackish and increasingly salty water from ground wells which is the major source of drinking water for the majority of our people? Do we keep building sea walls to protect our people's homes?. Do we keep diverting resources from other equally pressing priorities such as health and education programs?

Scientific evidence project that our islands will no longer be able to sustain life in the not too distant future. We must therefore prepare for this. And we are doing

this Madame Co-Chair . But we cannot do it alone within the time frame we have. We need to partner with the international and global community if we are to succeed.

Co-Chair

This brings me to the third area that we wish to stress at this meeting. Kiribati very much welcomes the theme for the Samoa Conference of “genuine and durable partnerships.” – we see this as the only effective means for achieving MDGs and long-term sustainable development goals for SIDs given the existing constraints in the economic, trade and financial global systems. The importance of durable, meaningful and genuine partnerships that are underpinned by the principles of equity and fairness, respect and accountability cannot be over-emphasised.

Co-chair

Let me give an example of a partnership which can be improved. The very ocean which is threatening the survival of our people from sea level rise is also one which our people depend on for their daily sustenance and for food security. The Ocean is also the only way out for us from the calamity of climate change. We may be a Small Island Developing country but we are also a Large Ocean State. We are custodians to some 4 million square kilometers of ocean. The annual total landed value of the Fisheries Industry in our water is approximately US \$4 billion annually. Yet only 5-8% of this come to us as resource owners in any given year. Where is the equity and fairness in this?

There is a need to relook at and restructure the nature of private and public partnerships in industries such as fisheries, tourism, agriculture etc. A more equitable partnership underpinned by mutual respect, goodwill, fairness and accountability will go a long way in providing an enabling environment for sustainable development to take place.

Co-Chair

Education is another area where we are giving major focus in Kiribati. As depressing as it is, the scientific evidence is clear. Our islands will no longer be able to sustain life in the not too distant future and it is our responsibility to

prepare our people NOW for this. Education can become our people's *new land* and this is where migration with dignity comes in.

While relocation is seen as an act of last resort, education provides 'concrete pathways for relocation' options for our people. It also delivers important solutions for our short to medium term SUSTAINABLE development goals. There is therefore a major focus on improving the quality of education for our people as well as a new focus on TVET programs designed to up-skill our people and increase their employability. This means our people would have become more equipped through education and would have acquired more skills contributing to our effort to close the gaps and implement the BPoA, the MSI, MDGs and now the SDGs that are in the making.

And if our people do chose to migrate, they do so with dignity and can contribute meaningfully to their new homes and be good citizens rather than "climate refugees" who stand at the corner street of their new homes asking for help.

Our people may very well end up on your shores and be your people, so it is in our collective interest to work in partnership, together to up-skill and provide a good solid education for them. We can only do so much. But with the continued and strengthened help of our partners, and with the forging of new meaningful and genuine partnerships, the sky is the limit.

Co chair

Now is the time to pose some real hard questions and come up with some real tangible and implementable solutions. Now is the time to test the relevance and sincerity of the intent of this family of nations, as we discuss the post 2015 development agenda, as we embark on the international year of the SIDs, as we prepare for the Samoa SIDS Conference on Sustainable Development and as we prepare for the Summit on Climate Change called for by the Secretary General this year.

All these provide opportunities and platforms to forge new partnerships and coalitions which can provide what has been missing link so far...the necessary enabling environment for sustainable development to take place in Small Island Developing States.

Thank you.

