



76th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY TE BERETITENTI TANETI MAAMAU
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI
“GENERAL DEBATE OF THE SEVENTY-SIXTH SESSION”
16 SEPTEMBER 2021

Theme: “Building Resilience through hope to recover from COVID-19, rebuild sustainably, respond to the needs of the planet, respect the rights of people, and revitalise the United Nations”

Mr. President
UN Secretary General
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

At the very outset allow me to share warm greetings from the Government and the people of the Republic of Kiribati. In the name of the Almighty God, I begin by sharing his peace and blessings. Kam na bane n Mauri!

Acknowledgement

Mr. President,

I join previous speakers in congratulating you, on your election to the Presidency of the 76th Session of the United Nations. I wish you every success as you chart a new course for a re-vitalized United Nations capable of energizing and supporting the efforts of all nations and people, particularly those lagging behind due to the many challenges that are far beyond their economic power and means.

I also join SIDS leaders to congratulate the Government of the Republic of Maldives for inspiring our SIDS family that a small developing member state is as equally qualified as a large developed state, to lead and serve this global family.

On this note, I wish to assure you of Kiribati's full support, as you discharge your duties for the Assembly, and avail my Government's commitment for initiatives that seek to transform our shared planet earth, into a wealthier, healthier, and safer home. This is the core of Kiribati's Vision for 20 Years (KV20) which is aligned with our agreed 2030 Agenda.

Contextualizing the Theme

The theme is a powerful wake up call to continue to place our trust and faith in this body created 75 years ago with promises of a peaceful and secure home for our peoples and all living and non-living resources. Much focus leading up to the 76th UNGA has been generated on accelerating progress on UN 2030 sustainable development agenda. Yet in the onset of unprecedented challenges, a renewed focus on achieving the SDGs has been centered around **recovery** and **building resilience**, as reflected in our theme this year.

Mr. President,

In Kiribati, the concept of resilience is well understood. It has been the foundation of our survival, from the times of our ancestors, to this day. To build resilience, my ancestors navigated the vast Pacific Ocean, to create a wealthy, healthy and peaceful home in the 33 beautiful islands that have now become the sovereign Republic of Kiribati. Through challenging times, the people of Kiribati endured and remained resilient, living in peace and harmony with their environment and our friendly neighbors.

Mr. President,

Some may wonder, how the people of Kiribati managed to survive in these remote islands surrounded by a precarious and unforgiving ocean. Like our brothers and sisters across the Pacific and across our SIDS region, the people of Kiribati are people of the ocean. We have lived, thrived, and survived by caring and respecting one another, and sustainably managing the bountiful resources of our ocean.

Mr. President,

Building resilience remains a core foundation of my government's Vision for 20 Years to create a wealthier, healthier and more peaceful nation, for the people of Kiribati. We must nurture our people, to create healthier and more peaceful communities and societies. Accordingly, my government has aligned our KV20 with the development frameworks guiding our United Nations, including the 2030 Agenda, the SAMOA Pathway, and other related agreements, in a manner that prioritizes our people.

Therefore, as we embark on this 76th Session of our General Assembly, I must indulge you, Mr. President, to recall our commitments under our UN Charter, to build a safe, peaceful and secure home for our peoples, today and in the future. To recall the hope bestowed upon us as governments, to respond to the needs of our peoples, and to respect our mother earth. Equally important is our commitment to maximise benefits to our people, to uplift our communities, and create a wealthier, healthier and more peaceful United Nations.

Human Rights

Mr. President,

To ensure that sustainable development in Kiribati, is inclusive, transformative, and endures to "leave no one behind", my Government is working tirelessly to reduce inequalities and mobilize targeted support to marginalized communities. As a party to a number of core Human Rights Treaties, Kiribati continues to commit to obligations to report to the Human Rights Council. I was pleased to note that Kiribati's universal periodic review report was adopted at the 45th Session of the Human Rights Council in 2020. We appreciate and commend the very positive and engaging and mutually enforcing approach adopted by the universal periodic review process that fully respects the sovereignty of a member state under review and encourages it to progress its human rights obligations at its own pace and in harmony with its traditional values and systems that are also based on the dignity and sanctity of human life.

Trade

Mr. President,

Mitigating the adverse impacts of the pandemic continues to be a challenge for Kiribati due to our reliance on imported goods, including health goods and services to meet our

essential needs. Kiribati recognizes that trade policy needs to be holistic and synergized with our broader development priorities. The Government prioritizes the improvement of our digital connectivity, as digital trade holds great potential for inclusive growth and socio-economic development.

Responding to COVID-19 and adjusting to the new normal

Mr. President,

I acknowledge the support received from the United Nations and its agencies and from our development partners during this pandemic which have been truly instrumental in providing vital necessities in terms of medication, food and health equipment to name but a few. I am pleased to inform that Kiribati is on the trajectory to having more than 50% of its population vaccinated. I am also pleased to share that more than 70% abroad have been safely reunited with their families. But since the discovery and outbreak of the Delta variant, our remaining nationals especially our seafarers have again been left stranded.

We will continue to work tirelessly to repatriate our stranded nationals, following the protocols and procedures of the countries that our nationals remain, and in line with our own national protocols.

Fisheries & Ocean

Mr. President,

Kiribati is blessed with a vast ocean that provides us with abundant resources to support our economies, and sustain our lives, our culture, and our future. Of vital importance is securing the limits of our maritime boundaries against the threats of sea-level rise and climate change. Kiribati believes that once delimitation of our maritime boundary is completed and submitted to the UN Secretary-General in accordance with UNCLOS, maritime boundaries would remain permanent and shall not be affected by climate change and sea-level rise.

In recognition of our commitments on biodiversity and sustainable fisheries, Kiribati was appointed the 2019 Commonwealth Blue Charter champion for sustainable coastal fisheries. As Champion, Kiribati will lead efforts promoting collaborative research, workshops and seminars, exchange good / best practices in the practicalities of sustainable coastal fisheries, and showcase success case studies amongst Commonwealth countries.

Climate Change and Biodiversity

Mr. President,

Recognizing that Kiribati remains vulnerable to Climate Change, I wish to highlight that my Government is committed to continue to build national resilience and enhance actions aligned with climate-resilient sustainable development.

Climate change and its current impacts are on-going and will continue to impact our people, in particular the most vulnerable. Our resilience as a global community is being tested, and moving on from this, we as global citizens hold the ball to strengthen the resilience of our mother earth subject to the enhanced actions that we take to ensure its sustainability and prosperous future. We need to recommit ourselves to our obligations under the Paris Agreement, by putting the needs of our peoples first, and remain guided by what is best for our people.

Global issues of biodiversity and climate change are closely linked, and we cannot address one without the other. Kiribati is committed to raising ambitions for the post-2020 global biodiversity and climate change targets and I call upon leaders to join Kiribati to enhance collective efforts on this important global issue.

Food Security

Mr. President,

Food Security is indeed a shared priority across all SIDS, and remains a priority under the SAMOA Pathway, as well as the Kiribati Vision for 20 Years Plan.

Kiribati remains committed to sustainable development through food security and is very pleased to respond to the call by the UN Secretary-General, for the convening of a Food Systems Summit. The Summit dialogue can trigger the creation of robust food systems in-country and on this note I encourage fellow leaders to support this important Summit and join Kiribati and others when the Food Systems Summit officially convenes.

Conclusion

Mr. President,

In conclusion, my government looks forward to work with you, as we embark on this renewed journey of hope and faith for a wealthier, healthier and more peaceful future for all our peoples. My government offers its full support to you as you lead our collective efforts

to recover, rebuild sustainably, respond to the needs of our planet, and most importantly, respect the rights of the people of our United Nations.

Finally, let me close by sharing with us all our traditional blessings always of Te Mauri, Te Rāoi ao Te Tabomoa (Health, Peace, and Prosperity).

Thank you.