



STATEMENT BY HE PRESIDENT ANOTE TONG
Third International Conference on SIDS
Apia, Samoa 2 September, 2014

Mr President
Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen

I bring warm greetings from the Government and the people of Kiribati, on whose behalf I am honoured to address this august gathering.

The convening of this Third International Conference on SIDS in Samoa and in our Pacific region, is indeed a landmark event in the history of SIDS, and in particular, for Pacific SIDS, being the first ever global SIDS event of such magnitude and significance to be hosted in our part of the world.

At the outset, I wish to thank our kind Host, the Honourable Prime Minister of Samoa and the Government and people of Samoa for their warm welcome and hospitality, and for the commendable effort they have put into preparations to receive a gathering of this magnitude on their small but beautiful shores.

Coming from a small island Pacific nation, I know that the hosting of a UN Conference is no small feat, but Samoa has risen to the occasion and done a magnificent job. In congratulating Samoa, let me add that Kiribati, as I am sure our other fellow Pacific island nations too, also share in Samoa's joy and pride in its successful hosting of this Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. We join the voice of our host in welcoming you all to Samoa and to our region.

This clearly demonstrates a reality that though we may be small island states, we are able to accomplish big things, with the cooperation, assistance and support of and in partnership with our own local communities and development partners. This should set the tone for our dialogue and interaction over the next few days.

Mr President,

Allow me to also acknowledge and commend the great work undertaken by the Co-Chairs of the SIDS Preparatory Committee and all those involved in the finalization of The Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action or the SAMOA Pathway Document, which

embodies the development aspirations and hopes of SIDS in achieving sustainable development and sustainable futures for our peoples and communities.

I also wish to commend the strong support that has been provided by our UN Secretary General and the UN system towards this very important undertaking, and I wish to register Kiribati's appreciation to the UN Secretary General for his sterling leadership and demonstrated personal commitment to the need to focus global attention on the special vulnerabilities of SIDS, the challenges and opportunities.

The convening of this important Conference and the designation of the Year 2014 as the Year of SIDS, attests to the UN's recognition of the need to highlight the special case of SIDS, and 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.

Mr President,

We meet today against the stark reality that twenty years on following the adoption of the Barbados Programme of Action, and in spite of subsequent international conferences and international agreements and commitments dedicated to address issues of sustainable development for SIDS, the reality remains that SIDS have yet to realize their full potential in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Many, including my country Kiribati, are not likely to meet MDG targets by 2015, but we are encouraged that the Post 2015 Development Agenda will also focus attention on the unfinished business on MDGs

Furthermore, global action and genuine commitment to address climate change has not matched the severity and existential challenges which SIDS, and indeed the global community face from climate change. These have further exacerbated the already well documented challenges facing SIDS.

Mr President

The very fact that we are gathered at this conference to refocus 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 and transformational development approaches are necessary, starting from within our own nations and moving out to regional and international multilateral processes, institutions and partnerships. For example, the issue of graduation is one such matter that some of the most vulnerable of SIDS are grappling with today. Is it fair that they be beckoned "ready

for graduation” when their vulnerability to a host of socio-economic and environmental issues is high?

It is imperative that we do 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 we represent - Our People!

Mr President,

We also welcome the choice of the theme for this Conference, “durable and genuine partnerships,” which cannot be more relevant at this point in time for SIDS, for it underscores the importance of a shared and inclusive approach towards achieving sustainable development for SIDS. It is a responsibility that must be shared through genuine and durable partnerships between governments, development partners, the private sector and civil society

While we accept the full responsibility for our own development to improve the well-being of our people into the future, and are determined to achieve this by finding national solutions to overcome the enormous development challenges that constrain our efforts, we recognise that given our special circumstances as SIDS, we cannot succeed without the genuine support and commitment of all relevant stakeholders and the international community.

Mr President

The SAMOA Pathway provides an important blueprint for the sustainable development of SIDS and as a way forward to catalyze enhanced global support towards our shared goals.

It captures and aligns closely to the development priorities of SIDS espoused in the Outcome of the Barbados Programme of Action agreed two decades ago, most of which remain relevant but unresolved to this day. The means of its implementation are also closely aligned to the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI) and MSI + 5, which are also more relevant than ever if we are to aim for transformational changes for the benefit of our people..

Mr President,

The success we all aspire to achieve from the SAMOA Pathway, will however, depend on the political commitment of the international community and genuine and durable partnerships forged at this Conference and post Samoa. This must be matched with genuine commitment to increase and scale up resources and improve modalities for and access to sustainable financing.

For development to be sustainable and truly effective, it must be appropriately tailored to the specific national needs and development challenges of SIDS. Having said that, the reality is that even amongst SIDS, there are differences in development circumstances and challenges. There is no: “one size fits all” solution and pathway for sustainable development. Much more attention

needs to be paid to capitals and to nationally identified priorities for we know better what the needs of our people are.

Climate Change

Mr President,

For us in Kiribati, Climate Change remains the biggest challenge of our time and calls for urgent global action, including international legally binding commitments to cut greenhouse emissions. Climate change is an existential challenge for low-lying atoll nations like mine, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Tokelau, and the Maldives.

We therefore welcome the inclusion of Climate Change as a stand-alone goal in the SDGs, as agreed to by the SDG Open Working Group and welcome its reinforcement in the SAMOA Pathway document.

The Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership which we adopted at our Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in the Marshall Islands in 2013, demonstrates our political will from our Pacific region to address this crucial issue as a matter of urgency.

We are encouraged that the Declaration has been accepted by the UN Secretary-General as our gift to humanity, and it has also received support from other countries, many of whom are represented in this Conference. We hope that the declaration and our aspirations embodied in it would gain the full support of all countries.

Mr President,

As I have highlighted on numerous occasions, the issue of climate change remains the most single pressing challenge for us in Kiribati, and we cannot meaningfully talk about sustainable development and sustainable future for our communities without addressing Climate Change, which is threatening the very survival of our people, and our future survival as a sovereign island nation!

The geological make-up of our islands as atoll low-lying nations, rising barely three meters above sea water level, lends us more vulnerable than any other nation in the world, to impacts of climate change. We are in the frontline of climate change...and we are not alone...we share this fate with low-lying atoll nations like Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, the Maldives and Tokelau, as well as the many coastal communities living in villages, towns and cities around the world.

We are "the early warning system" and the global community cannot NOT listen to our stories and the plight of our people. Climate change and its impacts knows no boundary, and while we may be in the frontline now, other nations and communities will eventually become the next frontline and victims of this calamity. It is only a matter of time!

As a front-line nation, we in Kiribati are already experiencing the adverse impacts, of climate change. It is causing coastal inundation and accelerated coastal erosion resulting in salt water intrusion into our limited fresh water sources, loss of territory and involuntary displacement of communities. Its impacts are also creating food and nutritional security, increased health problems and destruction of homes and public infrastructure. Already, the impacts are putting enormous pressure on already stressed domestic institutions and the national budget. It is affecting the sense of well-being of our people.

The impacts are also threatening to reverse the development gains already made and are constraining our national capacity to meet the MDGs and the delivery of essential quality services to our people.

Mr President,

For us, climate change is happening now. Because of climate change, our future is uncertain. Our future survival as a sovereign state as a distinct culture, and people is uncertain! These uncertainties have raised a new and urgent dimension to the definition of security and human rights!

As members of this United family of nations - an institution that embodies the promotion of human rights and the dignity of its global citizens, I appeal that the issue of climate change be addressed as matter of urgency and as a moral obligation!

For us it is no longer about who is to blame. It is about the survival of people, men women and children, whole cultures, whole communities, villages, cities and nations. It is about what can and should do individually and collectively by all of us and our nations...as good global citizens NOW.

Mr President,

Given the cross-cutting nature of climate change impacts, my government has mainstreamed sustainable development principles into our national development plan, policies and strategies. Climate change and adaptation measures are also integrated into our national budgeting process and development programs to strengthen disaster risk management.

My Government adopts an inclusive and a whole of Government and whole of nation approach towards addressing climate change impacts and towards strengthening our resilience. This involves planting of mangroves and public awareness programmes throughout the country. Very recently, we have launched an off-shore aggregate mining project which allows for the eventual elimination of foreshore aggregate mining and prevent accelerated erosion of our fragile coast-line.

My Government has also purchased land in Fiji using our own meagre resources to assist in our efforts to address the issue of food security and to promote long-term development goals.

My government's "migration with dignity" strategy is an investment in the education of our people and the up-skilling 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 worse-case scenario, when our islands can no longer sustain human life.

Furthermore, Mr President, Kiribati has in July this year, initiated with other front line low-lying atoll island states of Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands, the formation of a Coalition of low-lying Atoll Nations On Climate Change (CANCC –*can see*). The CANCC (*cansee*) 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.

This initiative, Mr President, is spearheaded by the concerns we jointly share about the increasing severity of the challenges facing our people now 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 has also highlighted that urgent action must be taken now to assist our countries and all vulnerable communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change now being experienced.

The Coalition will also take the rare opportunity afforded by this Conference on SIDS to stage a Joint Special Side Event to share our story and the plight of people. We have taken the position that being on the frontline comes with the responsibility to not only bring the human face to the climate debate but also seek to catalyze and gain traction of global action to this global problem. This Special Event will highlight that it is about people, communities, women and children. It is about the development challenges faced by our low-lying atoll countries, as a result of climate change. We thank those countries who have partnered with us and seek more partnerships in this massive task.

Mr President

The CANCC initiative demonstrates our political commitment and determination to find innovative solutions to the threats we face from climate change. While we are doing all we can to adapt to the severe impacts of climate change, we cannot do this alone.

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, and climate financing facilities are not easy to access. We hope to forge genuine and durable partnerships during and after this Conference to help us adapt and build our resilience as nations, as distinct cultures, as peoples to this existential challenge.

OCEAN

Mr President,

The Ocean plays a pivotal role in the sustainable development of SIDS, and especially so for Kiribati and other Pacific SIDS, being custodians of the ocean, the Pacific Ocean, which today, provides the remaining healthy tuna stocks in the world.

Its significance in our daily lives, our cultures and in our development aspirations as Pacific SIDS is aptly captured in the Pacific Leaders' Forum Declaration that we recently adopted in Palau last month "The Ocean: Our Life & Future:

For Kiribati, our vision for achieving sustainable development also hinges on the blue economy, or the conservation and sustainable management of our marine and ocean resources.

While we in Kiribati are a Small Island Developing State, with a total land area of a little over 800 square kilometers, 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 in terms of 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, through genuine partnerships.

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. 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 has a vision 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.

We know that only through genuine partnerships can we realize this vision. This is demonstrated in the recent joint venture we established in Kiribati a little over two years ago in Fisheries. This joint venture provides the opportunity for us to participate in the processing and export of our own fisheries products which is already paying dividends in value adding from this resource and in the generation of employment for our population.

Direct foreign investment and genuine partnership is therefore a way forward in this regard, and I hope that many more similar partnerships will be forged!

Mr President,

Human activities have been responsible for the accelerated degradation of our global environment in the pursuit for short-term economic gains without due regard to the health of our oceans and our environment.

Unsustainable fisheries practices, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing, dumping of hazardous wastes in the ocean and industrial activity that have caused excessive carbon dioxide emissions.

These activities have gone on unchecked for far too long. Their combined impacts have resulted in what we are seeing today – fast depletion of fishery stocks, ocean acidification, coral-bleaching and sea-level rise, increased ocean temperatures and a change in the global climate system!

Never in human history has the health of our oceans and planet earth been so much challenged!

Mr President, we, the international community, 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 400,000 square km, representing 11% of our total EEZ..

PIPA is the largest living laboratory where scientists can study atoll bio-diversity, coral reefs in their pristine environment, coral bleaching and coral recovery. PIPA is one of our response strategies to the climate change challenge, an attempt to better understand the phenomena and how our atoll eco-systems can adapt.

The PIPA is also a major spawning ground for tuna stocks so its closure will contribute to conservation and the rejuvenation of fish stocks and to global food security.

This is Kiribati's investment in the future and our contribution to humanity and to the conservation and preservation of marine life. Not only for the people of Kiribati but for the global community and for future generations.

PIPA's 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

Kiribati very much welcomes the high priority that the UN places on the protection of oceans and marine resources, and the decision made recently by the SDGs Open Working Group to have Oceans, a stand-alone goal in the SDGs.

In our Pacific region, we take our responsibility seriously in ensuring the health of our ocean given the central role the ocean plays in our lives and our sustainable futures.

As a region and at individual national levels, we are actively involved in the protection of our ocean, through policy and technical support from our own regional organisations, like the Pacific Islands Forum, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Forum Fisheries Agency and SPREP, along with the Parties to the Nauru Agreement – a sub-regional group of Pacific SIDS who are major resource owners; as well as with the support of our development partners.

I call on the international community, Distant Water Fishing Nations and the private sector, civil society, including UN agencies such as ESCAP, FAO and IFAD, to partner with us and to support our efforts through our regional organisations as well as through bilateral arrangements in this regard.

Mr President,

This Conference on SIDS takes place at an opportune time ahead of the UN Secretary-General's Summit on Climate Change later this month and the adoption of the post 2015 Development Agenda on a set of sustainable development goals that will replace the MDGs.

It is important therefore that the outcome of this Conference on SIDS and the urgency required for global commitment and action, accelerated and enhanced cooperation; and genuine and durable partnership to effectively address the severe and multiple development challenges that continue to prevail in SIDS. We urge that the SAMOA Pathway, take centre stage in these discussions and multilateral processes, and inform decisions on the conclusion of multilateral outcomes that can benefit our people on the ground in SIDS.

This is imperative and this is the challenge we must all rise to.

In closing, Mr President, allow me to wish you the Conference and all participants, our traditional blessings of TeMauri, TeRaiaoTeTabomoa – May Health, Peace and Prosperity be with us all.

Thank you.