



REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

**His Excellency Tebuai Uaai, Special Envoy and Kiribati
High Commissioner to the Republic of Fiji**

Ministerial Statement

**Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk
Reduction**

19th – 22nd September 2022

Brisbane, Australia

Honorable Minister Pat Conroy

UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction

Honorable Ministers

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Government and People of the Republic of Kiribati, I bring you warm greetings, Kam na bane ni Mauri and Greetings to you all.

Let me, at the outset, express our heartfelt gratitude to our gracious host, the Government, and people of Australia, for their warm welcome and hospitality.

Let me also commend and thank the host and conference organizers, the Australian Government, and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction for their tireless effort into organizing this Conference that would provide opportunities and a platform for us in the Asia Pacific Region to review disaster risk reduction efforts and share and learn innovative and practical solutions to minimize disaster risks and strengthening the resilience of our people. Kam bati n rabwa, Thank you very much.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the last Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2018 held in Mongolia, the Asia Pacific Region who are amongst disaster-prone regions in the world, have yet again, must endure not only natural disasters such as the recent Drought Crisis affecting Kiribati and Tuvalu but this time, the compounding effect of Covid-19 disease outbreak that sadly took the lives of many and challenged the capacities and capabilities of developing countries like Kiribati.

However, while the Covid-19 outbreak and drought crisis may have crippled Kiribati's efforts into pursuing national goals and targets for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, like its unwavering quest to address Climate Change impacts, the Government of Kiribati is more committed than

before to sail through this storm and work to address the many challenges it brings while also implementing its goals and targets for the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

Kiribati's drive to addressing these challenges is further enhanced by the continuous support and assistance of its development partners in the Asia Pacific region and across the Globe who immediately provided support and assistance to the Government and People of Kiribati in times of need such as the Covid-19 Outbreak and the Drought Crisis along with other areas of support and assistance that have supported my Government into progressing and realising its development goals and aspirations. For this, thank you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the last meeting in Mongolia, the Kiribati Government in its effort to strengthen national and local mechanisms on disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation, have progressed into implementing its commitments to achieving Target E of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030.

1. The first of these milestones is improving and strengthening Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Governance both at the National and Sub-National Level.

In 2019, the Kiribati National Disaster Act 1993 was repealed and replaced with a new act namely the Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change (DRMCC) Act adopted in parliament in 2019 along with the approval of the DRMCC Regulation by Cabinet which now served as our National Disaster Risk Management Plan.

The new DRMCC Act and Regulation which is closely aligned to our national policies, the Sendai Framework and the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific amongst others, provide provisions which ensures that the Act and Regulation incorporates ALL RISKS, promote a multi-sectoral sector coordination approach and inclusiveness, leaving no one behind.

Moreover, these newly established policies will ensure policy coherence between disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and sustainable development which reaffirms Kiribati's position and commitment to Regional and International Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change frameworks and agreements.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To ensure effective coordination and implementation of disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation roles and responsibilities under these policies, the Kiribati Government's technical advisory group known as the Kiribati National Experts on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, or the KNEG as we call it, established in 2011, has its TOR recently updated to complement the mandate enacted under the DRMCC Act, DRMCC Regulation, the Kiribati Climate Change Policy (2018), the Kiribati Joint Implementation Plan on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (KJIP 2019-2028) and other Kiribati DRM and CC related policies.

Furthermore, the establishment of 23 Island Disaster Committees (IDCs) and Taskforces in the scattered Islands of Kiribati with an inclusive membership that is also formalized under the DRMCC Act will further strengthen Government's efforts to provide much needed disaster risk management and climate change support and assistance to communities at the Sub-National Level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Government of Kiribati is also committed to enhancing disaster preparedness, response and recovery, investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience and raising awareness for Kiribati communities to better understand disaster risks.

2. Strengthening Disaster Preparedness Response and Recovery

The Government of Kiribati through the support of donor partners has increased the number of weather monitoring systems in Kiribati from 6 in 2017 to 14 this time and there is a plan to increase more to give more coverage to the vast Kiribati region.

The Government of Kiribati through the twinning partnership with South Australia Country Fire Services (SACFS) and the Pacific Emergency Management Alliance of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) continues to work in strengthening Fire Response Unit. As the outcome of this partnership, the Government of Kiribati received 2 Fire Trucks from SACFS with 2 more to be received in the coming weeks, spare parts for maintenance of these Fire Trucks were also received and firefighting training from SACFS to commence in October 2022 now that the borders have opened. There is also a plan to expand this area of support to Kiritimati Island.

To further strengthen Emergency Management, particularly fire response, the Kiribati Government have also conducted fire drills in some national institutions and at a Primary school last year during the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction. More Fire Drills will be conducted in the near future.

The Government of Kiribati this year, have also launched the “Women’s Resilience to Disasters Program” implemented by UN Women and the Ministry for Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs with a broad coverage of activities to ensure participation, protection and inclusion of Women and Girls in disaster preparedness, response and recovery planning and approach.

The Government of Kiribati through the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) are working on the final phase of a Tsunami Project with a wide range of activities to strengthen Tsunami preparedness in Schools.

The Government of Kiribati through the Disaster Resilience Fund have also provided support to communities around Kiribati for coastal protections initiatives such as seawall constructions, provision of 1 Tonne sandbags, ongoing installation of desalination plant units on 10 most vulnerable Islets in the Gilbert Group and disaster

response support to reconstruct damaged critical and public infrastructures, churches and village maneaba's (halls).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As crucial as disaster preparedness, response and recovery, there is also a need to ensure that we invest in disaster risk reduction and communicate disaster risk reduction messages to better understand disaster risks to ensure that not only our people are prepared for disasters, but most importantly, that the impact of disasters on our people, livelihoods, critical infrastructure and economies are also reduced and understood.

3. Investing in Disaster Risk reduction for Resilience and Understanding Disaster Risks

Learning from past disaster events experiences such as the effect of Cyclone Pam that damaged the Nippon Causeway, inundated a hospital and caused flooding in many parts of South Tarawa which seriously affected and disrupted livelihoods, basic social services and economic links, Kiribati's Environment and Infrastructure Policies have been reviewed and strengthened to promote disaster and climate resilient infrastructures.

Some of the examples of major development projects in Kiribati include Kiribati's duplex housing development of around 100 houses, renovation and building of Schools around Kiribati (Kiribati Education and Improvement Program) and the proposed masterplan for Kiribati Hospital. All these development projects have their floor levels above the ground to reduce risks from coastal inundation and flash flooding events.

Therefore, to ensure that Government's efforts into investing in disaster risk reduction is continually promoted at the National and Local level, awareness raising on understanding disaster risks is crucial and this remains a key priority in Government DRR and CC Programs and activities.

Over the years, the Government of Kiribati have conducted a wide range of Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change awareness raising and trainings such as during the Biennial Forum of Island Mayors in 2020, to the Disaster Chaplaincy Network implemented by the Kiribati Uniting Church, People with Disabilities Workshop held this year and in many other meetings and workshops as requested by Government sectors, NGOs and Faith Based Organization.

Beside Government, NGOs such as ChildFund, Kiribati Red Cross Society and Live and Learn also continue to deliver DRR and CC awareness programs and activities to Schools and Kiribati communities.

These wide range of trainings and awareness will ensure that the targeted audience understand National and Local DRM and CC Policies, understand disaster risks and actions needed to be implemented to strengthen resilience from Disasters and adapt to Climate Change impacts.

4. Leadership in the Region

Ladies and Gentlemen

As you are aware, the Mid Term Review (MTR) of National Implementation of the Sendai Framework 2015 – 2030 has commenced. The MTR Process is very crucial to be able to map out and stock take progress and challenges in the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

This would mean that we will be able to identify our achievements as well as our limitations into reducing disaster risks and this way, we can provide ways forward that would strengthen our capacity and capability to reducing disaster risks and achieve our sustainable development goals and the Sendai Framework and in return, strengthening resilience of our population from disasters and Climate Change impacts.

As a region that is Globally considered as disaster prone, we hope that the reports produced from the MTR process will further strengthen and enhance our partnership

to collectively address the challenges identified and work to provide practical solutions for our vulnerable communities.

5. Challenges in implementing Specific Sendai Framework Recommendations

Ladies and Gentlemen

Like many other Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Kiribati is constantly being challenged by;

- i. The complications relating to financing preparation and responses to disaster events particularly in the scattered Islands of the Gilbert Group.
- ii. The absence of a risk transfer mechanism (such as risk insurance) which has resulted in flood of requests for assistance processed under the national disaster resilience fund project each year
- iii. The inability of our communities to meet costs associated with disaster events causing wider impact on our national budget to fill in the gaps and to fund other developments
- iv. Communicating analysed early warning messages to our rural communities because of the geographic and dispersed nature of our islands.
- v. Increase in population and urbanization that have created pressure on the environment, resources, and land especially on South Tarawa
- vi. Coastal Protection issues which have greatly increased with communities requiring urgent support and assistance

Despite these challenges, the Kiribati Government wishes to express its renewed commitment to the implementation of recommended actions from the on-going mid-term review.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the theme of the conference depicts “From Crisis to Resilience: Transforming the Asia-Pacific Region’s future through disaster risk reduction” and as a region that is globally considered prone to disasters, let us join hands and work together to address the common challenges that we face to ensure a safe and secure region for this generation and the generations to come.

I wish this forum fruitful deliberations with our Kiribati traditional blessing of Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa, meaning health, peace and prosperity.

Kam bati n rabwa. Thank you very much.