



**His Excellency Beretitenti Anote Tong's Statement on the occasion of the
Rio + 20 General Debate, 20 June 2012, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil**

Today's gathering marked twenty years since we last assembled on this beautiful land to deliberate on sustainable development. The 1992 historical Earth Summit marked the distinctive debate on environment being central for a sustainable future. Since then we have faced many challenges, challenges that also provide us with opportunities to reflect and to rethink on our approaches towards sustainable development and I believe that the burning question that we should ask ourselves as we reassemble here today is, have we steered enough towards the right direction?

Mr. President;

Honorable Leaders and country representatives;

United Nations Secretary General;

Distinguished delegates;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Kam na bane ni Mauri and greetings from Kiribati!

I have no doubt that we have all come here today with a purpose – that purpose being to secure a better and safer future for our children and our children's children. But let me pose a somewhat challenging but very relevant question "are we here to secure the future of each other's children or just our own?"

Excellencies;

Ladies and gentlemen;

I believe that our respective answers to this question hold the key as to whether or not there is any credibility in this whole process; whether it has any meaning for all of us? Our experience over the past twenty years, clearly indicate, that as a global community we have failed to achieve sustainability for most; some through mismanagement and

some through our collective abuse of the global commons in the name of sustainable development. This is especially true for the most vulnerable countries on the frontline of the climate change challenge. The science on climate change as reported by the IPCC makes this very clear.

I am sure we all agree that our mission today in coming to this Rio+20 Conference is to take stock of past performance and to see if we can do better. A great deal of international dialogue has been ongoing over the past twenty years; the ongoing and unresolved UNFCCC negotiations; the negotiations leading up to this very conference; we are now almost at COP20 and of course numerous other meetings. It all started here with the historic Rio Earth Summit twenty years ago which was a milestone in first acknowledging the environment as one of the three (3) pillars of sustainable development.

We are back here again but with a great deal of knowledge about the state of our planet and our performance over that period in ensuring that it remains sustainable for future generations. Armed with this bank of data, we are today in a much better position to make better informed and the right decisions which we can be excused for not doing in the past. So what prevents us from doing the right thing?

Sustainable development may be defined as that balance between developments now without compromising opportunities for future development. But my sense of justice also insist that sustainable development should be defined as that balance between development by one country but not at the cost to other countries or to the global commons. The science, in particular on climate change, clearly indicates that over the past twenty years we have collectively applied our own convenient definition of sustainable development.

Over time we have come up with new definitions of sustainable development such as Green Growth. And whilst I am a firm believer in the concept of Green Growth, in the need for global conservation and rational management of resources, terrestrial and oceans, as credible pathways vital to achieving sustainable development, I also believe

that it must be sustainable for the benefit of all but not just the few. That in my view, and in its most simple term is moral justice.

Let me take a few moments to comment on these new definitions and initiatives. As I have already said, I firmly support the Global Green Growth, the Global Oceans Partnership program and other initiatives which provide alternative pathways to ensuring sustainability of the planet. I believe that they provide a more positive alternative approach to a very complicated process which our experience with the stalled UNFCCC negotiations had demonstrated. I have always advocated that in the negotiations we should focus on those areas where we find agreement and get on with it rather than allow the more controversial issues to stall the whole process. But in supporting these initiatives, I do so with a very clear and loud warning that we should never at any time forget or ignore the science already available to us. The effectiveness of these initiatives in taking care of the planet must constantly be measured against the science already available.

In making these comments, I do so as the voice of a nation together with the few other most vulnerable countries on the frontline whose future survival are seriously under threat from the impacts of climate change. The science of climate change tells us that the international community has failed to ensure our future survival as viable nations within this century. We have become collateral damage to the narrow definition of sustainable development. The lack of clear commitment to date from the international community has not provided us with the guarantees that will allow us to meet the challenges posed by climate change. So my purpose today is to send a clear message and to urge all of us as a global community to ensure that the next countries on the line do not follow the fate of those countries that are on the frontline of this human induced calamity.

In spite of such a gloomy future, we remain committed to do the best we can not only to face the challenges ahead of us but also to make our contribution to ensuring sustainability of the planet for the rest. As an ocean nation, we depend so much on the

ocean for our lives. This has always been the case and will be so for our children and their children. As such we strongly uphold the concept of green development in a blue world and we are actively taking leadership in safeguarding marine biodiversity. To this end, we have committed over 400,000 sq. kilometers of our EEZ to be a Marine Protected Area - the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, popularly known as PIPA. As a region we in the Pacific have also committed to linking national marine protected area initiatives into a region wide Pacific Oceanscape comprising some 40 million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean. In this regard, I am also encouraged that the World Bank has initiated the Global Partnership for Oceans and it is our fervent hope that this initiative can gain momentum and global endorsement here at this Rio+20 Conference.

On another front, we limit and manage the exploitation of our fisheries stock through the restriction of vessel numbers and allowable catch demonstrating that though we derive over 50% of our annual income from fisheries license fees, we do not allow indiscriminate fishing activities as part of our conservation and management efforts to limit over-fishing within our EEZ. These are our contribution and our sacrifice.

To face the challenges of climate change we have mainstreamed our adaptation strategies into our national planning process. Our adaptation strategy includes maintaining the integrity of our islands both now and into the future within our limited capacity to do so; relocation as a last resort as necessitated by the scenarios predicted by the science among the limited options we have.

I have no doubt that in order to achieve sustainability, there has to be a commitment and sacrifice. The resources of this planet are finite, and simple common sense tells us together with the law of balance that the more one takes, the less the other will have. Let us be responsible citizens and renew our commitment to make our world a better place today and tomorrow for all. Let us do away with the conventional approach of negotiating our differences and let us find common grounds and pursue these.

In closing Ladies and gentlemen, let me share with you and all the peoples of the world our traditional Kiribati blessings of “Te Mauri”, “Te Raoi” and “Te Tabomoa”, meaning health, peace and prosperity.