

KIRIBATI COUNTRY PAPER
SECOND WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION
18TH - 22TH JANUARY 2005
KOBE, JAPAN

Mr. Chairman

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Kiribati is honoured to be here today to share with the members of the UN family our interest and concern with all kinds of hazards, their possible disastrous impacts, the vulnerabilities of life and the need for humanity to be committed to a partnership in equality but build on the complementarity of relationships.

I would like to thank the host country Japan and its people for the warm hospitality and generosity extended to us not just today but over the years in the case of Kiribati.

The government of the people of Kiribati also extend to ISDR and to you the UN for this window of opportunity, to use a common phrase these days to "talk the walk, and hopefully to also walk the talk."

We are gathered here today in the shadow of the tsunami wave that shattered thousands, darkened the panorama of hope and woven a tapestry of despair. Kiribati shares with all countries present at this conference the deepest feeling of sympathy – the more so because we have been there.

Kiribati would also like to share with the people of Kobe the memories of words left unspoken and feelings left unexpressed for the tragic event 10 years ago. Their achievement since then instil in us a feeling of wonder and signifies that there is always hope because of the creativity in sharing and commitments.

Mr. Chairman,

The statement by Mauritius, as chair of AOSIS and the statement by the Republic of the Marshall Islands on behalf of the Pacific Island Countries are fully endorsed by Kiribati.

These efforts by Small Island Developing States can only be effective if it is not only supported by regional but also by an integrated global network and support system. This conference is most timely, and for this reason Kiribati also supports the convening of the Third World Conference in Early Warning and the offer extended by Germany to host it.

Kiribati is a tiny country in the Central Pacific made up of 33 low lying coral atolls with an average height of 2-3m above sea level scattered over five million sq. kilometers of ocean with a total land mass of 690 sq. km. The population, according to the 2000 Census, is 84,494 with a 2% average growth rate per annum. With this smallness, Kiribati must be very insignificant in the eye of the world.

Like every country in the world, Kiribati faces many hazards but it is also most vulnerable to natural disasters, endangering and threatening the safety and health of communities or persons as well as damaging properties, the environment and so forth. Such occurrence embraces events brought about by cyclone, flood, tidal waves, tsunami, earthquakes, volcanic eruption, drought, air, maritime and civil disasters (such as fire or bush fire or explosion), a plague or epidemic and all other types of natural or man made events.

Kiribati urgently needs assistance on many technical fronts for example the construction of seawalls, construction of rain catchment reservoirs for each of the island as preparatory measures amongst many others.

We recognize the importance of our Pacific regional organizations namely, the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission and the South Pacific Environment Programme known as SOPAC and SPREP respectively. Both are needed by the Pacific for technical assistance, advise, capacity building support and the implementation of the Pacific Plan of Action in Disaster reduction of sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman,

George Bernard Shaw wrote that: "People see things and ask why. I dream of things that never were and say why not?"

Perhaps in this conference we need to create a culture of commitment in order to have a culture of prevention and why not?

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to extend to you and members of the UN family the Kiribati blessings, TE MAURI, TE RAOI, TE TABOMOA which means good health, peace and prosperity.

I thank you.