



**Statement by Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Honorable Dr
Teuea Toatu**

Leaders Segment at World Humanitarian Summit

Istanbul, Turkey 23-24 May 2016

Your Excellency, Mr Recep Tayyip Erdogan – President of the Republic of Turkey

Excellencies

The Secretary General of the United Nations

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and privilege for me to address this first ever World Humanitarian Summit on behalf of the Government and the people of Kiribati. It is a tradition in Kiribati to begin all formalities by greeting everyone present – ***Kam Na Bane Ni Mauri*** - meaning ***May You All Be Blessed***.

Let me begin by joining the earlier speakers in congratulating His Excellency the President of Republic of Turkey and his government for hosting this first World Humanitarian Summit in this beautiful city of Istanbul. The summit has brought us together from different communities, countries and regions to collaborate on this globally important survival issue facing humanity today.

All this would not have been possible, Mr Chairman, without the tireless effort of the UN Secretary General Mr Baan Ki Moon. In this regard, I would like to congratulate also the Secretary General for his foresight and commitment in spearheading the convening of this historical summit.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we come to this Summit as one global family representing the voices of the people we serve and the people to whom we owe a better world and future. We converge here today with one purpose: **to stand up for our common humanity and take action to prevent and reduce human suffering.**

We cannot deny that the world is in a worsening humanitarian crisis situation ever experienced since the end of the cold war. As world leaders, we can no longer afford to procrastinate on this humanitarian crisis, for each day we delay action is a day too many and can only result in further and costly human fatalities, forced displacement, epidemics and food crises.

Humanitarian needs had evolved since then but the current aid architecture and system had not adapted quickly and flexibly enough to meet the new realities. We certainly hope, therefore, that this two-day event will result in an agreed framework that will improve how aid is given and how the world reacts to humanitarian crises better.

Since Kiribati, like most of the Pacific Island countries, is not prone to war and political conflicts, allow me Y.E Mr Chairman to focus my intervention on natural disaster-related crises in the context of the devastating effects that climate change has brought to bear on the livelihood and well being of the people of Kiribati.

Ladies and Gentlemen, climate change affects us all, but it does not affect us all equally. Those who are least able to cope are being hit hardest. Those who have done the least to cause the problem bear the gravest consequences.

For us in Kiribati, climate change is not only a serious environmental issue; it is fundamentally an issue of security and survival. Our low lying islands that rise no more than two metres above sea level will not be able to sustain life once sea levels rise as a consequence of climate change. We have the severe inundation of the coastline in all of the different islands. Recently, we had an unprecedented high tide which destroyed a lot of the coastline and infrastructure, destroyed food crops and properties and intruded wells and fresh water ponds. The disturbing thing is that these unusual climatic events occur frequently at a rate that exceeds Government's ability to respond. The lack of resources and capacity to address these destructive climatic events is exacerbating the situation.

By all accounts, therefore, Kiribati is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Unlike most countries, if the sea level rises, we don't have anywhere to move back toward - we don't have any high ground to move toward to escape the rising sea. As a matter of first choice, we will continue to retain the integrity of our homeland as far as that is possible and progressively consider more robust mitigating measures as necessary.

What has the world done to help us in our struggle to combat the destructive forces of climate change on our livelihood, and hence our survival as a nation? The short answer is: very little. This is not to say that the international community has not bothered at all but rather they have procrastinated far too long to take decisive actions on this climate change crisis. As the US Secretary of State Kerry correctly remarked at the Ocean Conference, "climate change is a weapon of mass destruction and the world must unite and act now to arrest its destructive forces". The costs of inaction in ecological, human and financial terms far exceed the costs of action now.

Financial constraint is a fundamental issue to us as small island states. There is indeed a great need for the global and donor community to mobilize the financial resources needed and made them easy to access by small island states through simplified processes and protocols, thereby facilitating utilization of the funds for the timely implementation of the necessary crisis mitigation and adaptation programmes. It is important also that we take leadership in disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response coordination to ensure that humanitarian assistance is directed to where it is most needed and in accordance with the specific needs of the affected communities.

YE Mr Chairman, time restriction does not allow me to go through in detail the unique humanitarian challenges that Kiribati, and indeed most of the Pacific Island countries, faces in connection with the impact of climate change. But before I conclude, I wish to convey my deep gratitude to the government and people of Turkey for the hospitality and warm reception accorded to me and the members of my delegation since our arrival in this beautiful country. To everyone involved, KAM BATI N RABWA (meaning thank you very much).

I wish the Summit every success, and I do so with our Kiribati traditional blessings of Te Mauri (Health) Te Raii (Peace) ao Te Tabomoa (Prosperity).