President of the Human Rights Council

Heads of delegations,

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen.

In the name of the Almighty and on behalf of the Government and people of Kiribati, I greet and wish you all the best in our traditional way in saying,

Kam na bane ni mauri,

1. It is indeed a great honour for my delegation to join you on this occasion and thank you so much for this opportunity to present our third national UPR report. Please allow me to express my delegation’s deepest gratitude to all those who have worked hard behind the scene in the preparation for this report and in the implementation of recommendations arising from the previous UPR report.

Madam President,

1. It will be recalled that at the conclusion of the 2015 review, Kiribati received a total of 115 recommendations; 70 of which were supported, and 45 noted. I’m happy to report that Kiribati has implemented 65 out of the 70 supported recommendations within the constraints of limited financial resources lack of local capacity coupled with other organizational drawbacks caused by the change of government not long after the 2015 Review, the high staff turnover in key ministries and in the membership of the Kiribati NHR Taskforce, to name a few.

1. Despite these constraints, Kiribati remains strongly committed to implement these recommendations and produce the necessary changes and fulfill its HR’s obligations as expressed in its KV20 (Kiribati Development Vision over a 20 years period) that recognize human rights and good governance as key components for making Kiribati a nation of happy, healthy, peaceful and prosperous people by 2036.

*Madam President,*

1. This 3rd UPR report highlights the progress and achievements made and the challenges and gaps faced and the efforts made to overcome them since the last Review. Before proceeding further may I draw the attention of delegates to a number of errors in the report. On page 4 paragraph 29 the word “100 days” should be “1000 days”. On page 19 at para. 150 mention is made about Kiribati having ratified one optional protocol to CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography but no mention is made about the ratification of the second optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts which Kiribati has also ratified. On page 20 at para. 156 it is wrongly stated in the first sentence that Kiribati has ratified the optional protocol to the CRPD. In fact, this protocol has not been ratified by Kiribati. We request for this first sentence to be deleted. My statement today will not touch on all areas covered by the Report but will select those areas in which we have made much progress and also those that were of great concern to members of the Human Rights Council during the last review. The following policy achievements were made during the past five years: -
2. The establishment of the Ministry of Justice to oversee Human Rights policies, compliance and enforcements;
3. Completion of the Common Core Document and submission to the OHCHR;
4. Completion and submission of much of the outstanding reports on CRC, CEDAW and CRPD;
5. Accession to the UN Convention Against Torture in July 2019;
6. Ratification of the two Optional Protocol to CRC;
7. Completion of the National Human Rights Institution scoping study in September - October 2019;
8. Launching of the Kiribati National Disability Policy in 2018; and
9. Launching of the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Development Policy in 2019.

Madam President,

1. The following legislative changes have been enacted since the last review.
2. Juvenile Justice Act (2015);
3. Employment and Industrial Relations Code (2015);
4. Occupational Health and Safety Act (2015);
5. Amendment of the Constitution to establish the Ministry Justice (2016);
6. Early Childhood Care and Education Act (2017);
7. Penal Code (Amendment) Act 2017 to amend the provision of rape and associated sexual assault offences;
8. Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Act (2019);

*Madam President,*

1. Let me now provide a brief outline of the progress made on the six thematic areas mentioned in the Report namely Non-Discrimination, Prohibition of Slavery and Trafficking, Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, Rights to sound Health and Education, Discrimination Against Women, and Gender Based Violence.
2. **Non- Discrimination:**
3. In a traditional system that has worked well for thousands of years for the people of Kiribati based on the sacredness of the human being and a deeply embedded differentiation between women and men and between girls and boys every human being is considered sacred and must always be treated with respect and dignity. It does not allow any treatment that undermines human respect and dignity and is generally opposed to discrimination of any form. However in the case of women and men who are regarded as biologically and culturally different in functions and roles discouraging women from assuming the cultural roles of men and discouraging men from assuming the cultural roles of women is considered as not an act of discrimination but a proper and normal thing to do in custom. It is therefore often difficult for people not familiar with this traditional system to appreciate that a blind push for gender equality in certain fields of human endeavor could upset the delicate balance upon which the fabric of our society rests and upon which the peace, harmony and happiness that these people have enjoyed since time immemorial depends.
4. In this light, gender equality in Kiribati is therefore easily accepted in the more modern human activities such as education, employment, commerce but less so in traditional contexts where the roles of males and females are clearly defined and differentiated. However, with the passing of time, the two systems (the traditional and the modern) have interfaced and overlapped more and more in an increasing number of human activities towards gender equality.
5. Government is promoting gender equality not through a top down imposition of laws and policies but by supporting the happy co-existence of the two systems (the modern for the urban and the traditional for the rural) and encouraging the adoption of a bottom-up approach in the reform of gender related values and norms in a cautious manner.
6. Using this bottom-up approach, the Government has succeeded in promoting gender equality in the Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Act of 2019 which mainstreams the needs of women, children and people with disabilities.
7. It is hoped that using the same approach the existing gender inequality over citizenship and land ownership, would be eliminated once people realize and agree that the cultural contexts in which such inequalities were once justified had changed under the impact of industrialization and globalization.
8. It is also pleasing to note that the rights of newborns to citizenship has now been addressed with the posting of two Civil Registry staff in the Obstetric Ward for overseeing registration of newborns at the main hospitals while all medical assistants in the outer islands are enabled to do the same for newborns under their care.
9. Rights around LGBQTI is becoming an emerging issue which government is seriously studying in the face of much cultural resistance something which the Government believes can be best handled through a cautious bottom up approach.
10. **Prohibition of slavery and trafficking**
11. Even though slavery and trafficking are not yet a serious problem in Kiribati at this stage, it is acknowledged that underlying elements of human exploitation leading to slavery and trafficking of girls and young women in the sex industry do exist and continue to grow with the influence from outside. Government therefore plans to strengthen legal measures in the penal code and in other related laws not only to combat these activities but to also to tackle their root causes one of which is prostitution.
12. As part of Government’s effort to combat prostitution and trafficking, foreign vessels are checked before entry into port and before exiting out of port by a Boarding party made up of representatives from the relevant ministries of Government.

1. **Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation**
2. In support of the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, the Government has undertaken various projects and programs to ensure essential safe drinking water and sanitation are readily available and sustained. These include-
3. The Kiribati Outer Island Food and Water Project (KOIFAWP) supporting members of farming and gardening associations through trainings on the various aspects of farming and vegetable gardening and through other forms of assistance.
4. The water (and sanitation) needs of the urban population in Tarawa comprising more than half of the national population (130,000) have been well catered for by a State-owned enterprise named the Public Utilities Board.
5. A number of externally funded projects have enabled the upgrading and expansion of the water and sewerage systems that were built in the 1980s.
6. A GCF funded project is underway to increase the supply of fresh and clean water for South Tarawa where more than half of the population reside.
7. Water quality is monitored by the Laboratory Department of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.
8. Water supply and quality for the people in the Lines and Phoenix Islands is taken care of by the Ministry for the Lines and Phoenix based on Christmas Island.
9. **Health**;

*Madam President*

1. I am pleased to inform this gathering that basic medical care and services in Kiribati are free, but people are entitled to choose a paid medical service in private hospitals which Government encourages and supports. At the same time a large percentage of the population use traditional cures and practices to keep themselves healthy. Government continues to encourage these traditional healing practices and at the same time improve modern medical services in all hospitals and clinics. To curb the apparent high mortality and morbidity of newborns and mothers the following measures are being undertaken: -
2. Appointment of trained midwives in all outer islands’ clinics
3. With the support of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists many medical officers, midwives and nurses have been trained and equipped with the required skills and know how aimed at reducing the mortality and morbidity of newborns and mothers.
4. **Education**;

*Madam President;*

1. Kiribati believes that education is an essential ingredient for human empowerment which fuels all developments be it at the personal, family, community or national levels. This is why Government has invested much of its resources in education, as reflected in the Education budget taking up more than 20% of the total national budget.
2. Under such ambitious investment education is free and compulsory for the first six years of primary schooling. It is also free but voluntary for the next three years of junior secondary and again free and voluntary for the remaining three years of senior secondary for those who pass the required entry standard for admission into the limited number of places in the senior forms most of which are run by the larger Churches whose teaching costs and developmental activities are heavily subsidized and supported by Government.
3. With the enactment of the Early Childhood Care Education Act 2017 the education of young children is supported by Government from the age of 4 and this prepares them for primary education commencing at the age of 6. These are called pre-schools. Island Councils operating such schools in the outer islands are provided with teachers salaried through support grants.
4. The Inclusive Education Policy 2017 provides a data that shows more girls in school than boys, attributable mainly to the shift in cultural norms and attitudes of parents encouraging their daughters to participate fully in education
5. Pregnant girls are now allowed and encouraged to attend school under Section 4(2) of the Education Act 2013.
6. **Discrimination Against Women**
7. The report touches on a number of contexts where discrimination against women have for the past decade or so occupied the minds of lawmakers and policy advisors as well as church and community leaders.
8. But on top of all these efforts to combat and eliminate gender discrimination, I am pleased to report that 54% of all Government positions are now held by women and most of the top administrative and senior positions are also held by women, a clear evidence of the huge stride made for gender equality in Kiribati over the past few decades. Following are some key activities that have been undertaken to further reduce discrimination against women.
9. The Employment Industrial Relation Code 2015 has helped to create more women -friendly work places and to reduce gender discrimination and sexual harassment.
10. The Strengthening Peaceful Villages Kiribati (SPVK) Project is progressing into its 2nd phase in mobilizing women, girls, men and boys to promote respectful relationships and gender equality at village levels.
11. Discrimination against women over land ownership and citizenship for their foreign spouses has been addressed in a number of constitutional amendments which had failed in the past but have left “seeds” for ongoing debates which could hopefully and eventually lead to the passing of such Constitutional amendments.
12. An annual celebration of the white ribbon day coinciding with the International Women’s Day preceded by 16 days of public awareness and campaigns through radio and roadshows, etc. all aimed at cultivating the right mindset to reduce discrimination against women.
13. The creation of the “Kiribati Men Behavioral Change” group creating space for men in the group talking to other men with an aim to change the mindset of men to be less violent and to use non-violent means to express themselves.
14. While the participation of women in administrative and professional level in government is higher than men, their participation in political leadership has been very low. This has much to do with the cultural mindsets of women themselves generally reluctant to enter the political arena or even to vote for their fellow women folks who contest for elections for the national parliament or a local council. The number of women running for parliament elections has always been very low but there is a gradual shift in this mindset as shown by the increasing number of women contesting parliamentary and local council elections over the years.
15. To help boost the courage of women to enter the political arena, the Women Development Division convened a national workshop in October last year and organized a one-day mock parliament session involving women delegates from every island and giving them a feel of what it means to be a member of Parliament and this is planned to be an annual event.
16. **Government action and strategies to eliminate gender-based violence in Kiribati;**
17. It is reported that Kiribati is among the few countries where gender-based violence is excessively high, although many people in Kiribati believe that the survey from which this information was obtained was not properly conducted and has, as a result, failed to correctly reflect the reality on the ground. Regardless of the accuracy or otherwise of this alarming rate of gender violence, Government is nevertheless committed to do all in its power to introduce reforms aimed at reducing and eliminating gender-based violence.
18. Some of the activities of Government in this regard include:
19. The implementation plan of the Family Peace Act was developed in 2017. As part of the plan, community outreach to the outer islands including south Tarawa have been carried out to clarify that the law was made not to punish men but to promote family peace and wellbeing, thus removing the negative attitudes of men towards such law.
20. The establishment of the Kiribati Women and Children Support Center (KWSCS) in 2017 with the core task of protecting victims of domestic violence, in accordance with the provisions of the Family Peace Act through provision of counselling services and legal guidance and assistance for women, girls and children, as well as court services for survivors, accompaniment to the Police and medical services where needed. This center is based in the urban area and caters well for women and girls in the urban areas but it is also available for women and girls from outer islands.
21. The needs for women and girls in the outer islands are served by the Assistant Social Welfare Officers attached to the island councils. Also, the client support fund managed by the KWCSC is available for emergency needs of survivors extending from paying for immediate needs of survivors including food and clothing to evacuation of a survivor away from the perpetrator (often husbands) by paying for boat or air fares.

*Madam President,*

1. I have presented our case for this 35th session which captures much of what Kiribati has done to fulfill its commitments and obligations in the promotion of human rights at the national, regional and international levels.
2. I hope the Report clearly demonstrates that Kiribati has done its best to advance the cause of human rights despite the many challenges faced and is fully committed to find a way of overcoming these challenges with the belief that it can count on the good assistance and cooperation of all our good friends and partners present here today who have been very much part of our human rights story and journey during the past decade or so.

Let me conclude by thanking you once again for granting us this honor and by bestowing upon you all our traditional blessings of

 Te Mauri (H*ealth),* Te Raoi *(Peace) and Te* Tabomoa *(Prosperity).*

*Thank you.*