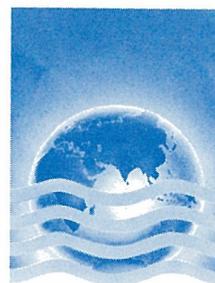


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**SMALL STATES
CONFERENCE ON
SEA LEVEL RISE**
MALE, 14 - 18 NOVEMBER 1989

KIRIBATI
COUNTRY STATEMENT

Delivered by

Hon. Babera Kirata O.B.E
Minister of Home Affairs & Decentralisation
of Kiribati

16-18 November 1989

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Maldives is an appropriate place for this meeting to take place. Coming personally from a group of low and scattered coral islands, in the middle of the deep and open Pacific Ocean, with all except one of our narrow islands rising no more than 5 metres above sea level, the problem which will affect Maldives from the rise in sea level, will be very similar to the sort of problem my island country will also face.

For this reason I thank the President of Maldives and his Government in taking initiative to organise this meeting, which has brought all of us to Kurumba Village.

Over the centuries the question of rising in sea level was never heard of. Our ancestors had lived happily for centuries on our islands, without fear that one day, our beautiful homes may be lost as a result of the deterioration in the environment. We, in this present generation, have inherited those small islands and we are very proud to be owners of the beautiful homes, which our ancestors had secured for us.

Kiribati is vulnerable to any abnormal rise in sea level. The ground water would easily become saline, making it impossible to obtain potable water, and agriculture destroyed. The plankton upon which fish live on will disappear, and the livelihood of

Kiribati people who depend on fish would be seriously affected. The effect of rising in sea level, accompanied by strong wind and high waves, would be disastrous for Kiribati.

If, however, we know with certainty when the rise in sea level will happen, planning will be easier. But because of the great deal of data which the experts are still looking for, there is also a great deal of confusion and worry, particularly by those whose future would be affected, like all of us attending this conference.

I say confusion and worry because for the small island nations, the present state of uncertainty is very damaging in two important aspects.

First, many scientists claim they need at least 20 years' research to obtain reliable information to prove the validity as of the Greenhouse Effect theory.

Secondly, for some scientists to predict now that all low lying countries could be entirely flooded when some of them are not 100% sure, will not only cause great concern among the island people, but more importantly will influence all future plans for investment on the small island countries.

It is for these two important aspects of this problem that my delegation will like to see international cooperative effort to concentrate on the issue of rising in sea-level and to distribute accurate and balanced scientific views, particularly to the small island nations where expertise and resources are limited.

Having said that, it does not follow that Kiribati is not concerned about the rising in sea-level. Indeed Kiribati believes the issue is a serious global problem which requires full commitment and global support to all the solutions that may be considered appropriate.

The possible causes of the problem have been identified and it is my delegation's views that, we, the small island countries, must be united in our voice against the continued use of the damaging substances to the environment, urging the developed and industrialised countries to quickly identify and put into use the harmless substitutes. Although our actions, whether individually or collectively, may not materially affect the problem, as people, we are entitled protection against all man-made activities which are believed to be destroying the planet that we are all a part of.

My delegation is pleased to announce that, although the Montreal Protocol has some limitations, Kiribati feels it is an important international document in the right direction, and we therefore fully support the Protocol. Arrangements are already in hand for Kiribati to sign the document.

My delegation is further pleased to note from other sources that many countries, in realising the Montreal Protocol has not gone far enough in prohibiting the use of dangerous gases, have immediately and voluntarily used suitable substitutes, and also have begun their own research for harmless substitutes. It is also pleasing to note other countries have even enacted legislations which will assist in preventing further actions that will aggravate the present environment problem.

The recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malaysia last month, issued what is known as the Langkawi Declaration on Environment on this very subject. That declaration is an important document as it really demonstrates and clearly indicates the full commitment of 49 Heads of Governments. My delegation is therefore pleased to note that a similar declaration to be issued from this meeting, is being considered.

My delegation fully endorses the concept of regional and international meetings such as this conference on this important issue. It is through this mechanism that we the Small Island Nations, can put across our voice effectively to the international community.

Finally Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Government and people of Maldives for the warm hospitality my delegation has received since our arrival in your beautiful country.

Thank you.