

STATEMENT BY H.E TE BERETITENTI ANOTE TONG
(On the occasion of the 106th Council Session, Wednesday 25 November
2015, Geneva)

Salutation

Chair of the Council and the Bureau
Director General IOM William Lacy Swing
Excellencies, Distinguished delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

As is customary allow me to begin by sharing with you all our traditional blessing of
'KAM NA BANE NI MAURI'. (May We All Be Blessed With Good Health)

Opening Remarks

At the outset allow me to convey my sincere appreciation for the kind support of IOM and the Government of Switzerland in facilitating my participation here today and for the warm hospitality extended to my delegation since our arrival in this beautiful country. Though it is relatively cold especially coming from a very warm Pacific island, nevertheless the beauty and serenity of this nation is always breathtaking.

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the government and the people of Kiribati it is indeed an honour and privilege to address this 106th Council Session of the International Organization for Migration.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

My nation – Kiribati – has been relatively isolated from the rest of world and for much of our early years of development, we believed were relatively isolated and safe from the impacts of what was happening elsewhere in this world. The sad reality however, which we have just come to realise, is that the negative impacts of Climate Change are threatening our future survival.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

For low lying atoll island nations like my country Kiribati, Climate Change is an issue of survival with the very real possibility of our nation disappearing under the ocean within this century. But even before that happens we are already experiencing extreme high tides and more severe storms on unprecedented magnitude. Damage to homes and severe inundation of the coastline and consequent damage to food crops and potable water are now more frequent events. Based on these experiences and the projections of sea level rise by the IPCC, we are faced with the very real possibility of our islands not being able to support the current level of population and life as we know it today. Migration in the context of my people's future has taken on a whole new meaning, a whole new dimension.

It is against this background that as a government we have adopted an adaptation strategy which commits to ensuring that our nation continues to remain above the rising seas and more severe weather conditions. But we also acknowledge the brutal reality that whatever we do to achieve that, it will be most unlikely that the scale of resource required to undertake adaptation measures needed to accommodate the current level of population will be forthcoming - not unless there would be a radical change in global thinking and commitment.

Relocation must therefore be part of our strategy for adaptation and for us this involves the preparation of our people for such a possibility, a possibility that they will have to seek a new home in another country. We are determined however to ensure that those who choose to must be able to migrate with dignity and on merit.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As part of preparing our people for relocation we have with the assistance of our development partners embarked on an intensive training program to upskill them to internationally recognized qualifications in vocational and trades training. Furthermore to complement outputs from these training programs, we continue to work with our more developed neighbors – Australia and New Zealand through temporary and permanent labor mobility schemes such as the seasonal workers schemes, and the more permanent New Zealand Pacific Access Category migration scheme and most recently the Northern Australia White Paper for Microstates pilot scheme. We believe that these programs offer mutual benefits for all parties involved

and may provide suitable models that could be replicated elsewhere and may well be worthy of further study by IOM.

As part of expanding this concept and promoting increased recognition at the global level, the Government of Kiribati last month, in conjunction with Pacific Island members of the Coalition of Atoll Nations on Climate Change (CANCC comprising of the Republic of the Marshall Is, Tuvalu and Tokelau, Maldives was unable to attend) and Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation hosted a High Level Dialogue on Climate Induced Migration. We were honoured by the active participation of IOM, other development partners and international agencies in this meeting. Through their participation, meaningful initiatives may arise that can support and facilitate Climate Induced Migration in a manner that benefits all those involved.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As governments and as leaders, it is our duty and moral obligation to ensure that the future of our people, our children, our grandchildren and their children is safe and secure. Against the threat of climate change it is vital that we as a global community act collectively and be as innovative as never before.

It is against this background that I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate IOM under the leadership of the Director General, past and present Chairs and that of the Council on its achievements as the leading international organization for migration. Indeed IOM has a very crucial role to play, particularly during these times of unprecedented instability in different regions whose impacts are disrupting the lives of men, women, children, whole communities and most likely whole nations.

This year's 106th Council convenes at a critical time in history when the world is experiencing mass migration on a scale never before seen in recent times and which will definitely continue to increase when compounded by the impacts of Climate Change. Through the leadership of IOM there is real potential to lessen the traumatic impact of displacement to enable all involved to live their lives in security and with dignity.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge with appreciation the generosity of the European Union and those other nations who have gone out of their way and beyond their comfort zones to receive asylum seekers at this time of need. It is indeed most gratifying to know that in the midst of all the negativity, the acts of terror and selfishness, human compassion and kindness continue to prevail.

In this connection, it will be remiss of me if I fail to take this opportunity to call on this Council and members of IOM for your support to our advocacy against climate change with particular emphasis on the very real possibility of increased displacement of people globally. As the world gets ready for the Paris COP21, we from the low-lying nations at the frontline of climate change remain optimistic that the world will arrive at a consensus that will leave no one behind. I believe that for any measure of success to be achieved at COP21 we must approach Paris as global leaders and citizens; not bring our national political agendas to a global issue such as climate change.

For the sake of our children, our grandchildren and their children, let us do what is right for them.

With these few words, I thank you for your attention and allow me to share with you all our very traditional Kiribati blessings of Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa. Thank you.