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## **KIRIBATI**

### **Human Rights Council**

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**

### **Republic of Kiribati**

### **35<sup>th</sup> Session (20-31 January 2020)**

**Joint Stakeholders' Submission on:**

## **The Human Rights Situation in Kiribati**

**Jointly submitted by:**

**Franciscans International (FI)  
Edmund Rice International (ERI)  
Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN)  
Life & Learn Kiribati  
Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre**

**Geneva, 18 July 2019**

## I. Introduction

1. This stakeholders' report is a joint submission of the above-mentioned organizations. The report highlights key concerns related to the Human Rights situation in Kiribati focusing on environment and the impact of climate change on full the enjoyment of human rights.
2. The data and information obtained for this submission came from various sources and include information from Franciscans International, Edmund Rice International, Kiribati Climate Action Network, Life & Learn Kiribati, and Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre Network in the Pacific region.
3. **Franciscans International (FI)** is a faith-based International Non-Governmental Organization with General Consultative Status with Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. It was founded in 1989 to bring to the UN the concerns of the most vulnerable. **Edmund Rice International (ERI)** is a faith-based NGO promoting and protecting human rights in over 30 countries. Established in 2007, ERI is primarily concerned with the Rights of the Child, the Universal Right to Education, and Ecological Sustainability. **Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN)** is part of global Climate Action Network (CAN) and desires to create a network of all other organizations in Kiribati and to liaise with the local government and international organizations on Climate Change issues affecting the Civil Society. KiriCAN priority is to support communities in sustaining their environments by improving practice. Most of our time and resources are spent with people in their community inspiring action and change. **Life & Learn Kiribati** works with communities throughout Asia and the Pacific, and in specific in Kiribati, to encourage individual and community attitudes, values and actions that are ethical and sustainable. **Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCS)** is Kiribati based organisation which provides support for women and children who are affected by violence.

## II. Background

4. In the second cycle of the UPR in 2015, Kiribati accepted most recommendations related to environment and climate change issues. As a low-lying Pacific state composed of 33 islands, 32 of which are atolls, Kiribati has made a relatively insignificant contribution to global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The atolls, which are low-lying and mainly made up of coastline, are therefore especially vulnerable to sea-level rise. One of the current challenges posed by climate change to the country is the continuous coastal erosion, especially in the atoll islands. As result, agriculture, access to food, water supply and health, are already affected in Kiribati. If this tendency continues in the coming decades, Kiribati will be one of the first countries to become uninhabitable due to climate change.
5. After the second cycle of the UPR in 2015, the Government of Kiribati has adopted several policies responding to the challenge of climate change. At the international level, on 22 April 2016, Kiribati signed 2015 Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and ratified it on 21 September 2016.
6. At the regional level, as a member of the Coalition of Low-Lying Atoll Nations on Climate Change (CANCC), Kiribati, along with other Pacific Islands, signed the 'Suva Declaration on

Climate Change’ in September 2015<sup>1</sup>. The members of this collation expressed their distress that climate change poses irreversible loss and damage to their people, societies, livelihoods, and natural environments. Further they also stated that climate change has created existential threats to their very survival and other violations of human rights to entire Pacific Small Island Developing States. Following the adoption of Paris Agreement, the members of CANCC stated that they “are deeply disappointed that current international pledges for action as contained in submitted Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), to stabilize global average temperature increase to well below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, remain grossly inadequate, with emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) continuing to rise”. In line with Paris Agreement, the Suva Declaration called for limiting the global average temperature increase to below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, for a transition towards deep decarbonization as well as recognition of the the importance of engaging civil society, women, youth and persons with disabilities as equal partners, in all efforts towards building climate change resilience.

7. At national level, we welcome the continuous implementation of the Kiribati Joint Implementation Plan specifically on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (KJIP 2014 - 2023), which is complimentary legislation to the National Disaster Risk Management Plan and the National Framework for Climate Change and Climate Change Adaptation. The goal of the KJIP is to reduce the vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change and disaster risks.

8. The Kiribati Development Plan 2016-2019 considers climate change adaptation as a development priority<sup>2</sup>. The plan was developed as part of Kiribati’s commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Agenda 2030, taking into account the context of Kiribati. Kiribati is well aware that climate change is a long term issue that threatens the sustainability of their economic development. International cooperation, especially for financing the adaptation programs, is a priority for Kiribati.

9. In 2016, the Government of Kiribati adopted Kiribati 20-Year Vision 2016-2036<sup>3</sup>, which is a 20 year development plan for the country. As a climate vulnerable state, the Vision recognises Kiribati’s vulnerability to climate change as a key constraint in their development. For this reason, it is necessary to mainstream climate change adaptation and mitigation into various programmes to ensure that the working environment is sensitive to environment conservation, climate change and sustainable development.

10. The human rights of the I-Kiribati (population of Kiribati) have been affected directly and indirectly by climate change, including economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to health, the right to water and right to food. However, the Government of Kiribati has not ratified the UN Covenant on the Economic Social and Cultural Rights (UN ESCR). During the second cycle of the UPR in 2015, the recommendation for ratification was not accepted. The ratification of international legal framework is very important in assisting the national policy making process and ensuring the coherence between international and national legal frameworks.

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<sup>1</sup> See the declaration at <http://pacificidf.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/PACIFIC-ISLAND-DEVELOPMENT-FORUM-SUVA-DECLARATION-ON-CLIMATE-CHANGE.v2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mfed.gov.ki/sites/default/files/Kiribati%20Development%20Plan%202016%20-%202019.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mfed.gov.ki/sites/default/files/KIRIBATI%2020-YEAR%20VISION%202016-2036%20.pdf>

## **Impact of climate change on human rights in Kiribati**

### **Right to food**

11. As most of the atoll islands in Kiribati are low-lying, the agricultural lands and crops are vulnerable to climate change. The fluctuation in sea-level has caused the intrusion of saltwater to agricultural land. The effects are poor-quality soil and low crop productivity. This has been exacerbated by other climate change events, such as inundation and the changes in rainfall.

12. Kiribati's economy is heavily dependent on copra, the dried meat of a coconut which is used to produce coconut oil. This crop, which comprises the majority of agricultural exports, is highly sensitive to rainfall making it vulnerable to the impact of climate change and the influence of La Niña years when droughts can be experienced. Other crops important to subsistence farmers are breadfruit, pandanus and *Te babai* (giant taro) which are all impacted by loss of land due to inundation, contamination of groundwater and storm surges or overwash.

13. As such, Kiribati no longer has food security. Climate change threatens the I-Kiribati's ability to feed themselves, thus impacting their realization of the right to food. The resulting national scarcity of agricultural products has forced people to rely on imported food commodities to meet their everyday needs. These imports are essential for survival, but they are costly and people buy whatever they can afford.

14. Kiribati is highly dependent on revenue from fisheries; with 81% of actual revenue in 2015 (2017 Budget Book), or approximately AUD 207.1 million, derived from fishing licenses and other fishing revenue. However, the new environmental threats that have emerged, which include the threat due to climate change, such as the depletion of water and pollution of water from salinity in the lagoons have affected inshore fisheries. Marine life is also under threat from pollution and plastic wastes. Any changes in climate will also have a direct negative impact on the marine ecosystem and fisheries stocks, which will result in reduced revenue for Kiribati.

### **Right to water**

15. Climate change impacts and related natural disasters are affecting the quantity and quality of the water available to the small island atolls of Kiribati, especially the overcrowded urban areas of South Tarawa and the growing urban villages of Kirimati Island. On low-lying atolls with porous soils, the groundwater lens – the main source of water available – is highly vulnerable to inundation and saltwater intrusion. During prolonged dry spells, the water lens can turn brackish, whereas heavy rains and storm surges can lead to contamination of the lens.

16. With its territory mainly composed of atoll, the source of potable water in Kiribati depends mainly from the rainwater harvest and aquifers. No estimate of the proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services is available for Kiribati, as data are not available in relation to the proportion of the population using an improved source that is accessible when needed and the proportion of the population using an improved source that is free from contamination.<sup>141</sup> According to the estimates in 2015, only 64.4 per cent of the population in Kiribati had access to basic drinking water services – that is, improved water within a 30-minute

round trip – with 35 per cent of the population having access only to an unimproved source – that is, more than one third of the population<sup>4</sup>.

## **Right to health**

17. Climate change may be directly or indirectly linked to an increase in vector-borne, waterborne and food-borne diseases and to other climate-induced and disaster-related diseases. In Kiribati, climate change is expected to increase the risk of infectious and vector-borne diseases, particularly dengue fever, diarrhoeal disease and cholera. Populated areas such as the capital city of Tarawa have been heavily impacted.

18. Kiribati has a high mortality and morbidity rate of both communicable and non - communicable diseases (NCD). NCDs includes cancer, hypertension, diabetes and heart diseases are becoming more common and increasing the health costs of the country. NCDs are increasing because of poor nutrition due to imported food and a limited ability to purchase food. Food insecurity is present in South Tarawa where over half the population is situated. It is also due to a lack of nutritional knowledge and the cultural perception regarding foreign food.

19. Deteriorating water quality will also impact on people's health. The high rate of population growth in South Tarawa is causing stress on water and sanitation services. The migration of more people to Kiritimati Island also puts pressure on the Government due to an increasing number of squatters and other land use issues<sup>5</sup>.

20. Many health problems in Kiribati are due to the increasing impact that climate change is having to their environment and the ability to grow and produce food, resulting in a reliance on imported food. With flooding occurring regularly many people become sick with water supplies and food contaminated. Exposure to these conditions have caused many diseases and further health problems for the people of Kiribati with the survival of young children being particularly at risk. Better health care facilities, hospital beds, medication and vaccinations are needed in Kiribati.

## **Women, Children and Cultural Rights**

21. In Kiribati, as well as in the Pacific region, women have a specific role in mitigating climate change through the preservation of knowledge and culture. Mothers will transmit the knowledge of the use of Pandanus leaves to their children, both as source of clean energy for household use, as well as part of their traditional costumes during the traditional performances. For example, the change in climate patter in Tarawa region affects the Pandanus trees. As result, with limited firewood from Pandanus on Tarawa, the traditional knowledge on the preservation of dancing costumes will also be dying out<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Data from the report published by Unicef, see

[https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/04\\_Situation\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Children\\_Kiribati.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/04_Situation_Analysis_of_Children_Kiribati.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> See KDP 2026-2019, p.36

<sup>6</sup> See [https://gendercc.net/fileadmin/inhalte/dokumente/6\\_UNFCCC/Gender\\_and\\_Social\\_Dimensions-Kiribati\\_Case\\_Study\\_01.pdf](https://gendercc.net/fileadmin/inhalte/dokumente/6_UNFCCC/Gender_and_Social_Dimensions-Kiribati_Case_Study_01.pdf)

22. Traditionally, women and girls also bear the task to collect water for the drinking and other household needs. In the context of Kiribati, the situation of water scarcity is likely put a particular burden on women and girls.

23. Children in Kiribati, as well as in Pacific region, are vulnerable to extreme climate events and natural disasters, such as typhoon or tsunami. Other effects of climate change like drought and high tides also harm vulnerable children. The KIJP 2014-20123 has recognised that ‘Climate change and disasters are felt first and most acutely by vulnerable and marginalized populations, including women, children, youth, people with disabilities, minorities, the elderly and the urban poor’ and that violence against women and children ‘can be exacerbated in times of disaster when normal social protection may be missing.’

### **Recommendations**

24. Kiribati faces very serious developmental issues with regard to poverty, over-crowding, child mortality, food security and water. Climate change acts as a 'multiplier effect' that makes all of these things worse. Therefore action on climate change will fundamentally contribute to enabling Kiribati to deal with development and human rights challenges. While recognizing the ongoing efforts taken by the Government of Kiribati and the limitation of the available resources and the responsibility of the international community toward the I-Kiribati, we make the following recommendations to the Government of Kiribati:

- 1. To ratify the UN Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.**
- 2. To ensure the provision of clean drinking water and access to water services and sanitation for all.**
- 3. To ensure the availability of adequate food and freedom from hunger, even in times of natural disaster.**
- 4. To ensure the adequate health services for all population, especially during the extreme climate events.**
- 5. To ensure that implementation of climate policy and climate actions should provide specific provision for children and women rights.**
- 6. To continue dialogue and pro-active multilateral and bilateral negotiations with other States on the protection of the human rights of the I-Kiribati by ensuring safe havens for I-Kiribati as their islands become uninhabitable.**
- 7. To continue to negotiate with the member states of the UNFCCC to include human rights approach in their 2020 submission of the reviewed Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC).**