



## 94-09-09: Statement of Kiribati, Mr. M. Baraniko

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AS WRITTEN

STATEMENT BY THE HEAD OF THE KIRIBATI DELEGATION

TO THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

(CAIRO, 9 SEPTEMBER 1994)

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellencies,

Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Allow me to express my Government's gratitude to be  
represented at this very important international Conference on  
Population and Development. On behalf of my delegation, I want to  
congratulate those who have been involved in the preparation for this

Conference. I also want to thank the Government and the people of the Arab Republic of Egypt for the kind reception extended to us since we arrived in Cairo.

Mr. Chairman, this is a historic Conference. It brings together all states from all over the world irrespective of their background to discuss the multifaceted issues of POPULATION and its impacts on DEVELOPMENT for the present and future generations. It marks a turning point in our effort to grapple with the problems before us as we are entering into the 21st Century.

Mr. Chairman, we come from a remote small island state of the Republic of Kiribati in the South Pacific. Briefly, Kiribati has a population of less than 75,000 and has been growing at a rate of 2.3%. Its land area is just over 800 sq.km. if the 33 islands which make up the Republic are put together. It is estimated that by the end of this year, our population will grow to 79,000. This may sound not alarming to most of us. But as a small island state, the impact has already been felt. We choose not to be complacent about this any more. The problems relating to population is with us and will continue to challenge each one of us in our life time.

During the last 10 years or so, our economy has been growing at a rate of slightly over 1% despite the high level of grant from various development partners. Our natural resources are scarce but we will continue to rely heavily on our population as a resource for our development. We, therefore, have an obligation, as a Government, to offer the best services available to allow freedom of choice to our people. Individuals must have the freedom to choose and aspire for better and improved life conditions. This is why we are continuing to

discuss with our development partners issues such as improved social infrastructure, improved rural development for equity purposes to check on the rising urban migration, sustained institutional building, and the importance of reviving important traditional lifestyle and cultures.

As a nation, Mr. Chairman, we care much about the quality of life of our people. Within village communities through taboos and ritual, a system of balances is in place to ensure that each child born is afforded the best protection society could offer. Unfortunately much of these have changed and more changes are expected as more and more of our people seek better opportunities in urban areas and overseas.

Mr. Chairman, for the last 50 years, the rapid rise in our population has been recognized as a constraint to our development. During the period, there was only one time when we successfully managed to reduce the population growth rate to the level comparable to our economic growth rate. This resulted from a vigorous family planning campaign undertaken by the Government with the financial assistance from the UN Agencies.

In the period leading to and immediately following independence, the momentum was lost and according to more recent data, fertility rate has not continued to increase, it has nevertheless failed to decline to any great extent. The campaign failed to achieve its targets because it did not focus upon traditional values and beliefs.

By the early 1980s, we began to focus more earnestly on population issues in our national development efforts. The issues include a decline in employment opportunities, overcrowding in the urban areas, a decline in rural production and the increasing demand for social services especially for the urban area. In response to these,

government embarked on a major decentralization Programme including the settlement of the less densely populated islands, integrated rural development, and the promotion of small scale industries.

To tackle the continuing high population growth rate and health related concerns, the Ministry of Health and Family Planning drew up a National Health Plan. The strategy in the Plan was to integrate population with broader development issues and the main objectives were to provide unrestricted choice to all couples, educating and advising them on family planning (including the use of the media for reaching the rural areas), and to establish a nation-wide working base in the communities and through NGOs for delivering health and family planning services. To coordinate all the activities in the Plan at the national level, a Population Committee has been re-established.

But having gone through those experiences and having realized the inadequacy of the approach that is confined to cutting down population growth only, we now come to this Conference with a strong conviction that population and the problems associated with it can not be addressed in isolation from the issue of development. To achieve target numbers in terms of lowering or stabilizing population growth is what most of us thought was a way to address the problems with population. We realize this is not necessarily an end to address the problems facing us today. We also realize that too much emphasis had been made in this direction without actually addressing the quality of life of our people.

We believe this Conference is about the improvement of the quality of life of every individual. It is about honoring our responsibility, as human beings, to perpetuate the continuity of

humanity in the context of sustainable development. It is about caring and rendering support for those who are disadvantaged so that they can enjoy and live a better life. We also believe that this is what should be aspired for in the Plan of Action that is currently being finalized for adoption. For the meaning of population and development becomes eroded when we accept development at the expense of the quality of life of the individuals, whether it be a woman, a child, a youth, or an elderly.

We come to Cairo, not to impose our individual ideologies on what we may consider the best approach to address the issues on population and development that is facing us today. We come to Cairo with an open mind and a clear conscience that no individual person nor country can address the issues effectively without acknowledging the need for collective efforts of the international community. The problems in association with population and development before us today require global action - something that we should not delay doing today and tomorrow because it should have been done yesterday.

The Plan of Action contains important issues which we welcome as a basis of action that will guide us in our combined efforts with the international community to improve and raise the quality of life of our people in the years ahead to come. We know this is no easy task. As a small island state made up of scattered low-lying atolls which barely rise above sea level, the task ahead is an enormous one. Already, we are experiencing tight competition for scarce resources and we know that competition will be tighter as we enter the 21st century.

But in spite of all the physical difficulties faced, we are optimistic about our future. We want to believe that, as human beings, we have the ability to strive for a better life. For us in

Kiribati, a better life is to live happily. A better life is to be self-reliant and having to do away with the continued generosity of others. A better life is to exercise self responsibility for the society we live in. It means respecting the right of other individuals, including the unborn, to live. There can be no better life or improved quality of life without these qualities.

At Rio, we urged the international community, in particular our development partners, to refrain from activities that contribute greatly to global warming and the rise of sea level. We did the same in Barbados. The reasons are obvious - we do not want our islands to be inundated. Our islands are our only home and to lose them means the loss of an important quality of our life. We, therefore, appeal, once again here in Cairo, to the international community not to lose sight of what we have pledged to do in Rio to safeguard and protect our environment.

In the Plan of Action, it is recognized that people may become displaced as a result of the inundating of their islands caused by the rise of sea level, especially those who live in low lying atolls such as Kiribati. As such, the need for flexible emigration policies of Governments of countries of destination, should the need arise, is also recognized in the Plan. But is this sufficient for the kind of life that we all aspire for? Should the industrialized countries be allowed to deviate from their responsibilities they have been called for in the Climate Change Convention with respect to the need to reduce their gas emissions which continuously contribute to the destruction of the global environment? We believe this should not be the case and we appeal that this does not happen. The very essence of this Conference calls for greater international solidarity to safeguard and protect our home, our islands,

our countries, and our world. There can be no other way!

Mr. Chairman, I do not wish to add any further dimensions on the subject of reproductive health and family planning. This has already received a lot of controversies and debate here in the Conference and the media. But let me emphasize that Kiribati, like any other Pacific island countries, has adopted very clear guidelines on this matter based, NOT on the materialistic concept of man, but on the concept that recognizes the right of every individual to live a better and realistic life.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, may I now take this opportunity to thank the international donors who have played and are continuing to play an important role in our efforts to aspire for a better and realistic life in the context of sustainable development. I wish also to thank the Conference Secretariat, through you Mr. Chairman, for giving us this opportunity to share with the rest of the world our experience on this important subject matter of population and development.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, thank you for your attention.

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