

## **KIRIBATI STATEMENT TO THE 26<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY**

Delivered by Teburoro Tito, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Kiribati to the United Nations and to the United States.

Mr. President, the Government and people of this beautiful and wonderful host country of Jamaica, Excellencies, Mr. Secretary General, Colleagues , Ladies and Gentlemen

In the name of Almighty Creator and God and on behalf of the Government and People of Kiribati I bring warmest greetings to each and everyone present here this morning and in my Kiribati language I say : “Kam na bane ni mauri!” meaning : Blessed and Healthy life to all of you.

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to join other delegations in congratulating you and the Government of France for your election to the Presidency of the ISA at its 26<sup>th</sup> Session and to wish you all the best as you guide the political deliberations and governance of this august organization. We also join other delegations in congratulating the Secretary General, Mr. Michael Lodge, for his re-appointment for a second term and also wish him great success in the execution of Assembly and Council decisions and in the management of the organization. My delegation assures you Mr. President and Mr. Secretary General in the daunting tasks ahead.

Mr. President, we thank the Secretary General and all his hardworking and dedicated Secretariat Staff for bringing us to where we are now despite the constraints of the unprecedented challenges before us. We fully appreciate the Secretary General’s very comprehensive and informative summary on the numerous activities and programmes of the ISA and we applaud the highlighting of a number of new initiatives that are very supportive of the efforts of small island states like Kiribati whose livelihood and development rely almost wholly on the health and wealth of the Oceans and Seas around them.

We commend the great efforts and achievements of the ISA during the past two years despite the huge constraints imposed by the Covid-19 Pandemic. I would like to highlight those that are of particular relevance to small island developing states like Kiribati.

It is pleasing to note that the Authority has prioritized capacity building for developing countries and we are grateful for a number of capacity building for developing and we are grateful for a number of capacity building programs that were conducted in the Pacific, one of which was hosted by Kiribati which enabled many relevant staff of Government to participate in the training thus increasing local awareness about the existence of vast amounts of high value and very high grade metallic nodules lying loosely on the deep sea floor waiting to be picked up by specially designed and environmentally friendly nodule collectors.

We would like to request the Authority to maintain and further strengthen its efforts in this direction so that the developing countries can start to build their supply of home grown deep sea scientists and technologists who not only understand the great economic potential that these naturally occurring metallic deposits in vast amounts present but also how the tiny invisible living and non living particles thriving hundreds and thousands meters down in the deep sea relate biologically, chemically and physically to the living and non living particles in the upper layers of ocean that constitute the building blocks of the corals and the fisheries upon which our island economies have relied on during past decades and will continue to do so for many years to come before the need for deep sea mining can be considered. It is critically important for an island ocean state like Kiribati to have an adequate supply of home grown deep sea scientists working side by side with deep sea economist, technologists and other related expertise so that the Governments have all the necessary information they need to make well informed decisions based on Science and factual data over the sustainable management and stewardship of their deep sea resources. In this connection my delegation warmly welcomes the program referred to in the report as the Deep-Sea Literacy Program

It is also pleasing to note that the Authority has an internship program aimed at countries that are under –represented in the workings of the authority. This is welcome news for Kiribati being one of those countries who is not at all represented in the workings of the Authority.

As a huge ocean state in the Pacific largely made of 99.98 % water and 0.02% land, Kiribati is fully appreciative of the existence of the UNCLOS, a treaty that has to a very large extent recognized the traditional rights of our forefathers over the oceans they had been using since time immemorial and which has transformed Kiribati from what used to be known in the PRE-UNCLOS Era as scattered small islands with small territorial seas to what we now know to be among the top largest island ocean states in the world enjoying the luxury and privilege of ownership over a huge area and volume of ocean within which immeasurably large amounts of marine wealth and biodiversity are stored, which we sometimes refer to as the underwater amazon of the world.

Mr. President

We believe that the Oceans and all the wealth and resources within them were created in the first place by Mother Nature for the purpose of supporting and sustaining human life and all other forms of life that human life also depends on. The invisibly small microscopic living things which fill up every tiny drop of the ocean do provide the building blocks for the bigger and larger marine creatures, including the coral polyps that created our islands, that the small developing ocean states rely upon for the growth of their fisheries and other ocean/sea based industries.

We therefore believe that the use of deep sea metals must be one of the development options in the future when the income from fisheries is no longer able to sustain the livelihood and wellbeing of a small island state. But it must be done with a degree of care and caution to ensure that the disturbance it causes to the living particles of the ocean is within tolerable and remediable levels of the natural equilibrium systems operating within and around the area of

disturbance. The greatest challenge before us is in the defining of the tolerable and remediable levels.

This is why Kiribati supports the initiative of the Republic of Nauru to urge the authority to come up with a mining code within the next two years so that we would all have a shared and mutually agreed idea of where to draw the red lines within which any exploitation of seabed minerals must operate setting out very detailed conditions and rules to be strictly followed by whoever is to carry out seabed exploitation.

While there is a trigger to expedite the finalization process of the exploitation regulation it is also vital that ISA expedite the finalization of other necessary frameworks such as the Regional Environmental Management Plan, appropriate Monitoring System and Program and Financial Payment Scheme or fiscal regimes and have them in place with adequate expertise at the ISA to ensure responsible development of the deep seabed minerals, to ensure protection of the Marine Environment and also to provide a clear mechanism for the equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits among parties involved. In addition Kiribati would like to make these additional points.

- (1) That ISA work in close collaboration with Developing States in particular Members of the Sponsoring States (who have the responsibility to conduct appropriate due diligence and effective control upon their contractor), to support and strengthen their national small administrations, avoid disproportionate burdens and advance their Capacity Development Programs and Technology Transfer to support the delivery of their regulatory functions.
- (2) That this Assembly acknowledges with gratitude the good work of the ISA Council and the Legal and Technical Commission regarding the preparation of the Draft Exploitation Regulation, standard and guidelines to the Draft Exploitation Regulation, and the ISA's Financial Payment Scheme.
- (3) That the Financial Payment Scheme to be expedited and finalized as well in parallel with the Draft Exploitation Regulation.
- (4) That the ISA Secretariat's capacity be further enhanced to support member States and deliver appropriate regulatory functions, including members from

the Sponsoring States to conduct appropriate due diligence and ensure effective control upon their Contractor(s).

- (5) That assurance be made that the implications in the event of transboundary harm to the marine environment of national jurisdiction are effectively addressed through the regulations, standards and guidelines, noting Kiribati's unique situation, one of the closest country to the CCFZ.
- (6) That further support be provided for the ongoing scientific research studies and data collection to form part of the responsible development of mineral resources and precautionary approaches.
- (7) That the recruitment of additional legal expertise to expedite the drafting of exploitation regulation, including additional environmental scientific expertise in the ISA be well resourced and supported.
- (8) In this connection Kiribati fully Supports the proposed Roadmap, with the view that the adoption of the Exploitation Regulation would be subject to the adoption of other necessary frameworks needed to complement the ISA's mandate and obligations under UNCLOS for the sustainable development of Deep-Sea Minerals, the protection of the marine environment and equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits

All of the above points and proposals relating to the development of Deep-Sea Minerals is aligned with Kiribati Vision (KV20) and is identified as one of the economic opportunities as a Developing State to meet our sustainable development goals. As such, it is in Kiribati's best interest for deep sea mining to be regulated effectively, with the view of balancing economic needs and rigorous environmental protection

We believe all of the above, daunting and insurmountable tasks they may seem, can be done and delivered to the satisfaction of all, if and only if we all agree to work together from the very start to the very finish line.

In closing, I join my colleagues in thanking the kind and gracious Government and people of this beautiful island of Jamaica for their warm hospitality and for their smooth and efficient arrangements that has enabled the convening of this Assembly.

THANK YOU.

