



HIS EXCELLENCY TE BERETITENTI TANETI MAAMAU POLICY STATEMENT 2020

(2nd Meeting of the 12th Parliament – 24th August to 4th September, 2020)

Honourable Speaker and spouse

Honourable Chief Justice

Honourable Vice President and your good wife

Honourable Members of Parliament and spouses

Heads of Churches and Members of the diplomatic corps

Distinguished guests

Fellow I-Kiribati both in country and abroad

Ladies and gentlemen

In His holy and gracious name, Kam na bane ni Mauri!

At the very outset, allow me to return the honour and glory to our Almighty God for his love and blessings of good health upon us all. I also acknowledge His protection and guidance in the lead up to our General and Presidential elections. Through His will, our people have spoken with resounding approval on the 23rd of June 2020. The Cabinet, Tobwaan Kiribati Party and I, are deeply humbled to continue serving our fellow I-Kiribati for another term.

We continue to acknowledge the invaluable contributions, commitment and service of our leaders, past and present. The responsibility of nurturing and leading a nation is not a light one and despite our different political standpoints, we share a common vision to advance this sovereign Christian country and its people.

In that same spirit of partnership, and on behalf of my Cabinet and party, I am pleased to formally present to this House, the manifesto of your Government for the next four years. As a Government, our manifesto continues to be driven by our our stern belief to make Kiribati a wealthier, healthier and peaceful nation that leaves no one behind.

This recent manifesto reflects our new standing commitments to the people for this term as well as the remaining few pledges from the last term that are accordingly and gradually progressed. These commitments are aligned to the ultimate goal of our Kiribati Vision 20.

Our KV20 recognises our unique opportunities to grow our economy from our natural, human and cultural capitals through sustainable practices and investments that would benefit the present generation and not jeopardise the access of our future I-Kiribati generations to these resources nor will it compromise their future aspirations. This is the approach that we commit to implement as we leap together into the next four years. Our motinnano as the pathway to our vision includes:

OUR FAITH IN GOD TO LEAD US AS WE SERVE AND DELIVER IN GOOD GOVERNANCE

Being a country of devout Christians, our leaders exemplify principles founded on their faith in God and are therefore courteous, loving and harmonious in their service. Our Constitution, our deeply rooted value of respecting one another and our communal ways of living and working together has allowed our people to enjoy political stability and our democracy to flourish.

Government is determined to stamp out corruption due to the disproportional impact it has on our shared resources. To address this important priority, Government created and strengthened institutions to deal with corruption: Leadership Commission to hold people in leadership positions to account and the Public Service Office for all civil servants. At the regional level, Teiniwa Vision endorsed by Pacific Leaders at the inaugural anticorruption meeting for Pacific Leaders held in February this year in Tarawa, will generate regional initiatives to address corruption but also serves as our national point of reference for this issue.

As such, Government will continue to review and update relevant legislations, as appropriate, to account for emerging issues related to corruption. The Leadership Commission will receive additional institutional strengthening and the Kiribati Police Services' capacity to maintain peace and security will be enhanced. Government will also initiate a legal sector reform and increase the number of parliamentary seats for Betio and South Tarawa constituencies.

A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY FOR EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Kiribati has a limited resource base and it is therefore critical that Government harnesses its resources in the most sustainable manner so that maximum output is attained without compromising the availability of these resources to future generations. Government will work to promote equitable distribution of wealth for the generation of today and tomorrow attained from our marine and land resources, fisheries, agriculture and tourism, to name a few.

Our Natural Resources

To achieve the above, Government will promote direct foreign investment especially in fisheries and tourism through the development of an investment-friendly tax regime and business environment. A tax-free zone will be established in the Line and Phoenix islands to attract foreign investment particularly tourism-related developments.

Further, Government will diversify its revenue base through the production, marketing and trade/export of goods derived from our local resources. This diversification will create job opportunities for locals alleviating the high unemployment rate, enhance inter-island trade through increased consumption of local produce and decrease dependence on imported food that contributes to the prevalence of non-communicable diseases.

Also noting Kiribati's airspace rights, Government will progress work to conclude the transfer of the management of our airspace through a regional approach with the view to increase economic benefits from this source but also improve efficiency and safety for uses of our airspace; and that Government will also develop its land in Fiji.

Fisheries

Kiribati is blessed with an extensive Exclusive Economic Zone, one of the biggest in the world. Fisheries has been the mainstay of our economy contributing over 70% of Government's annual revenue. When I delivered our policy statement 4 years ago, I alluded to our shared responsibility as custodians of our vast ocean and its rich marine resources including our fisheries.

This term, we will invest in increasing our participation in the harvesting and marketing of our fish and fishery products and engage in other value-added activities. To achieve this, Government will strengthen coastal and artisanal fisheries through appropriate incentive schemes; provide Small Medium Enterprise loans and reducing import tariffs on fishing gears, equipment and products; construct ice-plants on islets and islands as appropriate; provide boat for communities or wards yet to receive their share: and encouraging those engaged in the local fishing industry to learn and adopt modern fishing methods and technologies used around the world.

Government will continue to enhance the benefits derived from coastal fisheries. To this end, Government is committed to carrying out feasibility studies to develop its octopus and diamondback squid fishery; establish nurseries for pet fish and clams for ornamental purposes; and expand aquaculture and mariculture activities which target high-value fish and marine species for revenue-generation.

Similarly, Government seeks to maximize our share in fisheries revenues by exploring other options beyond the meagre revenue from fishing licenses. Options to be considered include buying shares in major tuna processing companies and engaging in bunkering services.

Tourism

Government acknowledges that each island has its own unique cultural and traditional appeal that could serve as attractions for tourists. Matched with our hospitable and courteous Kiribati ways, these serve as our competitive advantage in the tourism sector.

I am therefore pleased to share that Government in its effort to grow the tourism industry will establish tourism zones in both the Linnix and Gilbert groups and develop sustainable ecotourism opportunities. Kanton and selected islands in the Linnix group, including Tabuaeran and Teraina would be designated and reserved for high-end niche tourism market

Rallying interest to invest in the said regions would require assurance of continued high tourist flows and Government will put in place business-friendly strategies and infrastructure that support tourism including group tours.

Agriculture

I wish to further assert the importance of our natural resources in terms of our land-based resources particularly our agriculture for the health and sustenance of our people. A thriving agriculture will provide fresh produce (fruits and vegetables) that is nutritious and likely to increase youths' consumption of our local produce. A well-developed agricultural industry also contributes to the food security of our people and as an alternative source of income.

Noting the above, Government will promote production of selected root crops, vegetables and livestock in selected islands to reduce dependence on overseas imports and enhance inter-island trade which also increases our resilience when food shortages are experienced. To foster agricultural and livestock development, lands for farm use would be provided; climate-resilient crops and farming methods would also be promoted, and that Government will facilitate livestock development on outer islands through training and provision of stocks.

At the same time, Government will establish aggregation centres for markets and agronomy research centres. Coconut replanting schemes will be promoted along with the diversification of the coconut industry to increase the return on investment from this sector. In improving the coconut industry, Government notes its critical role to facilitate the access and provision of tools to support production of value-added products.

IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF OUTER ISLANDS

Our islands are scattered over an ocean of 3.5 sq km. This is both a communication and transportation hurdle for our development as a country and a people hence Government sees the critical need to develop the necessary infrastructure and services on the outer islands that is proportional to those available in urban areas in Kiribati. This will foster their economic growth and maximize their economic potentials enhanced through trade between the islands which will increase revenue for these islands.

Infrastructure

This is an ongoing exercise for Government which commenced in the last term and which I am pleased to share would continue this new term. This includes enhancing ICT and transport services within Kiribati and with the outside world; establishing and improving wharfs/jetties, ramps and boat channels for domestic travel and cargo shipments; tar sealing roads on outer islands and in areas where needed; improving runways and terminals as appropriate; construction of seawalls where needed; and developing Betio and Kiritimati to be transshipment hubs.

To reduce cargo shortages on outer islands, Government will establish a commercial hub for cargo and food supplies in the far-flung Southern Islands and increase the capacity of the local shipping industry for the movement of people and goods within and between the Gilbert and Linnix groups.

Another critical infrastructure for domestic households relates to water, sanitation and hygiene. In that vein, all households will be equipped with a water tank and proper toilet. This will also alleviate preventable illnesses related to poor water, sanitation and hygiene conditions.

Strengthening Outer Island Economies

I take this opportunity to make special recognition and convey our appreciation for the dedicated service offered in the last term by local government entities who play a critical role in complementing the central Government's delivery of public services to their respective peoples. This is an invaluable partnership for Government and that we commit to continue to enhance this strategic and genuine partnership to newer heights for the betterment of our peoples. I sincerely thank you for the great partnership and your Government offers its best wishes to you all in your upcoming council elections.

Moving forward this partnership, Government takes pleasure in improving existing or introducing new initiatives such as increasing the price of copra to \$4 per kilogram and copra cutters to be members of and benefit from the national provident fund; increasing the price of local thatch to \$3 per thatch; and infrastructure development, including sport facilities as required.

Funding and Resourcing

Funding and resourcing of Te Motinnano is pivotal to the achievement and realization of the commitments it contains for the people. Government is strongly committed to exploring ways of diversifying its revenue base and mobilizing resources to fund its operations and its Motinnano so that our progress remains on track for the achievement of our vision of a wealthier, healthier and peaceful nation by 2036.

In addition to the ongoing work to resource Te Motinnano, Government has formulated and endorsed a fiscal strategy for the appropriate and sustainable drawdown of the Revenue Equalisation and Reserve Fund (RERF) for development projects. I am pleased to inform you all that the value of the RERF remains above one billion (\$1billion).

Government will also invest in entrepreneurship for youth and women through increasing opportunities for youth who did not complete formal education to become marketable; introduce loans for women and youth for business start-ups; improve banking services through e-banking, ATM and EFTPOS; and introducing more commercial banks that would improve provision of banking services to outer island populations.

Additionally, Government will improve the loan interest of the Development Bank of Kiribati for housing, fisheries, agriculture and tourism to 5%. It will also improve VAT for businesses by reducing interest. The income tax threshold will also be increased from \$5,000 to \$7,500 per annum.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a cross-cutting issue that impacts the security of our islands and people. It also has implications on our culture and traditions as well as livelihoods. Government launched its legislative framework and policies on disaster risk management and climate change this past term to strengthen the adaptive capacity and resilience of our islands and people as well as our desire to continue to live in Kiribati. As a global issue, Government also takes a strategic approach in strengthening its access to global climate finance to support the implementation of climate-related commitments.

ENHANCING COOPERATION WITH PRIVATE SECTOR, NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Government has commenced coordination with the private sector, NGOs and CSOs, including church groups and local communities, to accommodate their needs and improve livelihoods as a means to achieve peace and prosperity. We are grateful for the cooperation and partnership that we have established in our joint efforts for development.

Enhancing partnerships with the private sector and NGOs

Government is committed to work with the private sector and NGOs, through a range of development initiatives to enhance partnership and economic growth. This will include, as necessary, providing targeted support for private sector and NGOs, legislative and policy reform and improved coordination with local business owners to improve the tourism sector.

Government is committed to support these initiatives by establishing a corporate body that will facilitate efforts to increase and enhance the private sector for small and medium enterprises.

Social Welfare and Protection

In efforts to improve social welfare and conditions, unemployment benefits would be provided to all unemployed citizens aged 18-59 in the amount of \$50 per month and bound for casual engagements in Government projects/programmes as decided from time to time. An elderly allowance of \$100 per fortnight would be provided for all citizens

aged 60 and over. These benefits and grants would be disbursed after the appropriation of the Government budget for 2020, and would be provisioned beginning 1 January 2020. Accordingly, this will include a 'back-pay' to cover funds owing from 1 January 2020.

People with disabilities will receive \$30 per month on top of current benefits. This would also be disbursed this year 2020, and disabled citizens would remain recipients, even after turning 60 years and being eligible for elderly allowance. Transportation for disabled citizens and women umbrella-organizations would also be provided

In the case of children under the age of 18 whose parents are deceased, who would otherwise normally provide them with support, Government will also support them through a special welfare grant for children, in the amount of \$50 per month. This also includes infants under the age of 5 who will also receive \$50 per month. In addition, there will also be financial support for youths who are enrolled in vocational institutions which they may earn through part-time work.

Government acknowledges the role of our Churches as fundamental in supporting our efforts to cater for the needs of our people and to promote peace and security. To that end, I am pleased to announce that we will be increasing our support funds to Church Groups to \$1.5 million per year. Accordingly, we will also increase our support to theological and divinity colleges established by our Churches to \$70,000 per year, noting their paramount role to nurture God-loving and peaceful communities.

Government also acknowledges the role our employees, not only in the public service, but also in the private sector, our local councils, church organisations, including our seafarers and fisheries observers. The combination of the services provided by all these personnel are critical for Government to achieve its development objectives for the people of Kiribati. I am pleased to announce that the annual leave grant to public service officials will increase to \$3000 per year and the retirement age will now be 60 years. A monthly housing allowance of \$100 would also be provided to all public service officials who do not reside in Government housing.

A leave grant of \$3000 would also be paid to all employees of VAT registered businesses, Government joint-venture enterprises and State-owned enterprises, local council workers (including special constables), church organizations, and all seafarers and observers. There will also be a 30% increase to the salaries of local council staff and pre-school teachers.

Youth and Sports

We are all blessed with individual skills and talents, in various forms, by our God-almighty. As a Government, it is our role to assist and support the nurturing and development of these skills and talents, and we are presently focusing on sports. As part of our Motinnano, we will focus on initiatives such as: increasing employment opportunities for sports and establishing a national sports institute; promotion of local competitions within each island and between islands; building of training facilities; increasing sports facilities

for our local communities; and enhancing incentives for those who represent Kiribati and win awards and medals at regional and international competitions.

ENHANCING GOVERNMENT SERVICES FOR THE PEOPLE

Government will continue its responsibility and services to its people, by improving our Health and Medical Services, our Education, improving land lease agreements, improving the conditions of our infrastructure, enhancing our foreign relations and forging strategic partnerships, and developing opportunities for economic growth for the Line and Phoenix Islands.

Health and medical services

For the health and medical services sector, Government will continue to prioritise the health and well-being of all I-Kiribati with a focus on prevention and so as addressing population growth. Government recognises its people as its greatest assets and are therefore worthy of its investment to secure their health and wellbeing.

While the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect many countries around the world, Kiribati remains free from the ravages of this deadly virus, and this has been made possible by the dedication and diligence of all public servants across the Government, in particular our Health and Medical Service officials, our development partners, all I-Kiribati and the public at large, in our joint efforts to work together and collaborate, to keep Kiribati and I-Kiribati safe.

Madam Speaker, may I kindly request Parliament to join me in recognizing this achievement with a round of applause.

In line with our policy objectives to improve the health and well-being of all I-Kiribati, Government is planning to increase the coverage of our health and medical services by building and establishing new well-equipped hospitals and health facilities across Kiribati. Clinics will be established in all secondary schools, theological schools, and elsewhere across the country, where it is deemed necessary. Initiatives will be implemented to support the establishment of private-sector facilities, which offer paid private health and medical services, as a means to broaden and expand the coverage and availability of services. In such cases, Government will also consider providing funds to all I-Kiribati to access these private services. In addition, promotion and awareness of the use of traditional medicine will be enhanced.

Government is committed to the establishment of a centre for health care, to convert local clinics to permanent structures for sustainability, improving medical referral services to Tarawa and internationally, establishing a national medical diagnostic network through enhanced partnerships, and the sustainable provision of and maintaining the quality of medical supplies. Efforts will also commit to provide well trained nurses and doctors to rural areas and all islands of Kiribati, and lastly to improve allowances for nurses and

doctors. There is also interest to encourage the establishment of private health insurance products and programmes that can assist in addressing citizens health needs.

Education

Education is very important as it is the foundation of development for the people of Kiribati. It is on this basis that the Government will not only commit to the academic stream of education but will also commit to the development and promotion of vocational skills. The Government is willing to provide incentives to high achieving students from the secondary level to tertiary level through awards such as medals, financial prizes as well as scholarships for placement in world class universities. Another incentive to promote education is the abolition of school fees for all school children, including form 7's in line with the Government manifesto. There will also be support to enroll students in vocational training institutes as well as the provision of meals and transport.

To enhance and promote the research capability and accessibility of schools, free internet will be provided to Junior Secondary Schools and Senior Secondary Schools. Students will be provided with Student ID Cards to access discounts for particular services.

The Government will also establish computer labs for those Junior Secondary Schools and Senior Secondary Schools who are currently without such facilities. Funds will be granted for the construction of additional Government junior secondary schools and fences for all schools. The necessary preparatory measures for building a university in Kiribati will be initiated. This is a new move and incentive to promote and enhance education in Kiribati.

In order to support and improve the quality of teaching and the value of education for children educated in Church-owned schools, the Government is willing to instigate certified and university-graduate teachers as education officers in these schools as well as to oversee and improve the awards and allowances for all teachers.

Land-lease and buildings (infrastructure)

The Government acknowledges that there are some I-Kiribati who are constantly unable to farm and tend to their lands and therefore denied the benefits that are due as a result of their land being leased. The Government is committed to double the lease rates for Tarawa and the outer islands. This prospect includes those lands which are used to accommodate Church and village maneabas, Churches, public soccer fields, water reservations and to provide special assistance and consideration to those living on South Tarawa and Betio.

Noting the limited number of houses to accommodate public servants, the Government has agreed to construct houses and provide schemes to address limited housing.

Training and Employment

Government will continue to improve its tertiary institutions to provide relevant technical and vocational education and training so that our locals can attain skills that are in high demand in both the local and overseas markets.

Government has a desire to roll out these courses on outer islands in the near future. Government will also explore new or increase existing employment opportunities abroad and to provide appropriate loan schemes to support utilisation of labour mobility schemes particularly the Pacific Access Category in New Zealand and potential workers under recognized schemes.

Foreign relations and strategic partnerships

Regardless of our remoteness and isolation from the rest of the world at large, it is vital that Kiribati continues to engage and maintain good relations with partners both at the regional and international levels. Noting our geographical disadvantage as well as the hindrance derived from our natural environment, maintaining cooperation with our partners is one of the keys to our development.

May I also take this opportunity to present special acknowledgment and appreciation to our partners and international organizations for their willingness to support our I-Kiribati nationals who are stranded due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. And also for the support and effort afforded for the repatriation of our nationals from their respective countries. Thank you.

Noting the importance of engaging effectively with the world and its potential benefits the Government will take necessary measures to strengthen its existing diplomatic ties and forge new partnerships. One of the steps will be to increase the diplomatic presence of Kiribati through the establishment of consulates and embassies.

Line and Phoenix Islands

With regards to the Line and Phoenix Islands, the Government through its Motinnano will strive to establish Christmas Island as the centre for businesses and the hub for commercial activity. This initiative will be another option to increase the national income, and at the same time create employment for our youth to offset the rising population and unemployment rate in the country. Those who are already living and leasing lands on Christmas Island will be paying a flat amount of \$1000 only with no additional charges and lease payments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In closing, I wish to reiterate to the public that the Government will endeavour to fulfill the initiatives as outlined in Te Motinnano, pledging its support for the betterment of all I-Kiribati through sustainable development for a prosperous future. As witnessed in our work and commitment in our first term, over eighty percent (81%) of our initiatives in Te Motinnano have been accomplished with only 19% remaining, and I am glad to share that these remaining 19% have been included in our Motinnano for the next four years. This is a testimony of the commitment of your Government and Tobwaan Kiribati Party to deliver on its commitment to the people of Kiribati as well as its willingness to continue the implementation of the obligations entrusted to it by the people of Kiribati.

Together with members of my Cabinet and the Government, I take this opportunity to offer our most sincere gratitude to all our unimwane and unaine societies, councils and councillors, Churches, businesses, youth, women associations, non-governmental organizations, Government ministries and State Owned Enterprises, development partners and to all of Kiribati for all the support afforded in one way or another during the last four years. Kam bati n rabwa.

For these next four years, it is paramount that we maintain our sustenance to deliver on our different duties to the best of our abilities for the betterment of the people of Kiribati. That which you nurture today, will be beneficial for your children and grandchildren in the days to come.

It is also my privilege to congratulate and wish blessings of good fortune to Madame Speaker in her role and duty in leading the Parliament House of Kiribati.

Bestowing the traditional blessings of our beloved country, Health, Peace and Prosperity to all of us.

Kam bati n rabwa.