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UN chief and Kiribati leader warn over climate change threat to Pacific islands



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrives in Tarawa, Kiribati to a cultural welcoming ceremony and traditional blessing by elders

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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon and the President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, today stressed that climate change posed the most serious threat to the livelihoods, security and survival of the island nation's residents and the inhabitants of the wider Pacific region, saying the phenomenon was undermining efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Both leaders reaffirmed the need for urgent international action to reduce emissions of the harmful greenhouse gases and underlined the need make climate change adaptation funding

available to finance the implementation of critical programmes to tackle the impact of climate change on communities there.

Mr. Ban and Mr. Tong highlighted the vulnerabilities and development needs of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), emphasizing the importance of “enhanced coherence, coordination and responsiveness” in support of those countries.

They also took note of measures undertaken by Kiribati, including mangrove forest management, major biodiversity conservation initiatives such as the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, water resource management and efforts to enhance coastal resilience.

Mr. Tong welcomed the first ever visit by a UN Secretary-General to Kiribati and expressed his gratitude for Mr. Ban's ongoing efforts to galvanize the world to address climate change.

Mr. Ban congratulated Mr. Tong for his active participation in the multilateral efforts to address climate change, particularly by promoting dialogue among Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)).

The Secretary-General acknowledged the value of initiatives like the Tarawa Climate Change Conference, organized by Kiribati in November last year ahead of the the Cancún Climate Change Conference in Mexico.

During Mr. Ban's two-day visit to Kiribati, he also met separately with the Speaker of Parliament, Taomati Iuta, and leader of the opposition, Rimeta Beniamina.

Discussions during those meetings also focused on the challenges and consequences of climate change. Mr. Ban said he would report to world leaders about his experience of the effects of climate change and urged the two officials to do more to tackle the phenomenon.

The Secretary-General also emphasized the importance he attached to raising the status of women and empowering them, including through appointment to senior positions.

Mr. Ban also had a meeting with Amberoti Nikora, the Minister of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development, as well as local communities, and spoke at length with villagers, including children, about their fears and concerns over the effects of climate change on their low-lying island.

At the end of his visit, Mr. Ban joined President Tong and young islanders to plant mangroves on a beach at Stewart Causeway to help protect the area from the effects of rising sea level.

He told reporters that planting of mangroves is one of the cheapest and surest way to protect coastal environments.

“Planting mangroves may be simple and may not [seem] much. But it even helps the economy. It generates some income,” said Mr. Ban. “Planting mangroves gives us a good lesson that if you care, if we care, for nature we will be better off in making this Planet Earth more environmentally hospitable, environmentally sustainable,” he added.

Responding to a reporter's question, the Secretary-General described Kiribati as being at the "front of the frontlines" on climate change. "I have seen for myself the real threats that are impacting on people. People are afraid of their own future, particularly young people," he said.

"I am urging world leaders to act now. The high tide shows that it is high time to act. I was so surprised to see the impact of these high tides, inundating these villages and roads. That can be prevented if we act now.

"We have to live with nature, but if we use our wisdom and act now we can live harmoniously with nature. That's the message which I will carry to the United Nations General Assembly, I will carry to Durban negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in December, I will carry to Rio+20 summit next year," the Secretary-General added.

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