

The Australian

UN boss warns 'frontline' Kiribati

- From: AFP
- September 05, 2011 3:16PM

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UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today warned Kiribati, a low-lying Pacific nation threatened by rising seas, that there was little chance of short-term progress on climate change.

Ban described the tiny Pacific nation, where some villagers have had to relocate in the face of rising sea levels, as "the frontline" of the climate change debate.

While the UN leader said he would continue to sound the alarm about climate change on behalf of countries such as Kiribati, he told islanders that prospects of a major breakthrough anytime soon were slim.

"It is most unfortunate, but perhaps correct, to say that any further significant progress on climate change negotiations is highly unlikely in the near future," Ban said.

He said, however, that climate change remained a top priority on the international development agenda.

"That is why I am here - to see the frontlines of climate change," he said.

"I will bring your concerns back to the world, to the United Nations General Assembly and to the climate change negotiations in Durban later this year."

The Durban climate summit later this year aims to kickstart faltering talks on how to address the issue of global warming. However the US and EU have already said it will not result in a binding deal on carbon emissions.

Ban said political commitment was needed to fast-track action on climate change.

"We have to protect our world so that our children and grandchildren never have to wonder how we could have been so irresponsible. Our only choice is to act now," he told his audience in Kiribati.

Ban will arrive in New Zealand later today to attend the Pacific Islands Forum, a summit of 16 regional nations beginning tomorrow where climate change is expected to dominate the agenda.

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