

Mr. President, dear Anote Tong,

First Ladies,

HE Prime Minister of Tuvala,

Mr Speaker,

Excellencies,

Distinguished

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

First of all I would like to say how delighted I am about this initiative, which is particularly important to all of us. The issue of climate migration is indeed at the crossroads of many of the challenges this century faces. However, it is rarely discussed beyond the States directly concerned.

Consequently, it is both appropriate and moving to broach the matter here, in this country and this region of the world particularly under threat and where it is directly experienced. In this respect I thank President Tong to gather all here in Tarawa Kiribati the representatives of the Fiji, Tokelau, Maldives, Tuvalu and Marshall Islands, whose commitment we all know and appreciate, and who I am pleased to see here today.

It is important for my Foundation to take part in this conference, to support your efforts to be involved in the project together with you, thus helping to promote it. I am delighted to see today that we have managed to bring together so many eminent representatives of organizations and international institutions.

Therefore I sincerely hope that we are able to make real progress both on this major issue and others, namely the Ocean, on which we have worked together, Mr. President, dear Anote Tong, with the cooperation of all the prominent figures gathered here today.

Because time is running out, climate change, as we all know, is already a reality.

Every day, it results in over one billion tonnes of ice melting on the Earth's surface which automatically leads to increased sea levels. Higher water temperatures also lead to water expansion, thus contributing to this increase.

Furthermore it creates a disturbing level of acidification which has weakened the ecosystems and now threatens several species of coral and shellfish.

On Earth, extreme weather conditions are occurring more often, floods are increasingly frequent and many ecosystems are disrupted, if not endangered. The result is, as always, a dramatic impact on the most vulnerable populations.

It is currently estimated that the number of people who have been forced to leave their homes for climate-related reasons is three times higher than those who have had to do so due to war or political conflict.

Yet these figures do not include the victims of sudden disaster, nor those who have to face ever-increasing daily dangers such as rising water levels and desertification.

In total, millions of people are concerned each year. Millions of our fellow human-beings are forced to abandon their land and property, their history and belongings, to flee from a tragedy for which they are not responsible. Millions of victims, the majority of whom live in Asia or Oceania, in countries with a low-carbon economy, in these countries which have contributed only slightly to the disruption of which they are the victims.

Because the paradox of global warming is that it hits those who are not responsible first. Those who consume less, who travel less, who are less developed and who have burnt less fuel, those who have generated the least amount of greenhouse gases.

The world should be aware however that the tragedies of our global civilization are never confined. No border or continent is able to stop such events. And although the weakest and most exposed are the first victims, there is no doubt that the entire planet will be affected sooner or later.

Forecasts tell us that things will only get worse. By 2050, it is likely that up to half a billion people will be concerned by migration related to climate change, water and energy issues, as well as future inevitable conflicts and sanitary crises that might result.

These millions of men, women and children, these millions of families who are uprooted from their towns and homes, if we do nothing, all innocent victims of global warming, will eventually come from every corner of the world:

- ⇒ from Africa, where flooding, drought and desertification have already resulted in many victims;
- ⇒ from America, where the devastation caused by Katrina, a few years ago, provided a foretaste of what a disaster that strikes highly built-up coastal regions could be like;
- ⇒ from the Arctic, where the retreating ice, thawing permafrost and increasing sea levels have already eaten into inhabited regions;

⇒ and from Europe, where land damaged by erosion, ecosystems weakened by global warming and regions devastated by floods have also increased.

That is why it is time to react and to give thought, as we are doing today, to the strategies to be adopted, which are numerous and complex. Please allow me to group them together around four priorities which I believe need to be addressed together:

- ⇒ in number one, the fight against the first cause of environmental migration, namely climate disruption;
- ⇒ secondly, the necessary enhancement of our knowledge, both with regard to the threats of global warming and its effects, and the potential consequences on human population;

- ⇒ the implementation also of prevention measures, wherever they are possible;

- ⇒ finally, the establishment of an appropriate international framework which would enable us to manage the crises brought about by these new types of upheaval.

The fight against climate disruption. I shall not dwell on this here, as I think we all agree on the need to arrive as soon as possible - in other words in Paris in less than two months' time - at a definition of binding standards. This will be difficult to obtain, but I would like to remain reasonably optimistic about the possibility of seeing things move forward significantly.

It is not merely a question of laying down laws but it is rather a question of changing the model globally and moving out of a carbon economy whose damage is too extensive for our Planet to bear. This necessity must eventually be imposed.

Although global warming is already underway and will be difficult to reverse quickly, it is vital that we keep it at an acceptable level, i.e. under the limit of 2 degrees Celsius. Otherwise the dangers we are talking about here will take on a very different dimension, difficult even to contemplate. That is why it is essential that the Paris Conference meet with success.

The second issue is knowledge. In this domain, as in everything that concerns the environment, it is not possible to act efficiently if we do not have a detailed and accurate vision of things. This alone allows consensus and is the guarantee of pertinent action.

However we are still relatively unprepared as far as this issue is concerned. Whether we are talking about, for example, precipitation patterns, their effects on the soil and their ecosystems, especially marine, but also the demographic, urban and strategic issues at stake, many aspects remain unclear to us. If we want to address the huge challenge of environmental migration, we need to develop specific research in this area.

This must be done as a continuation of the recent work carried out by the IPCC, whose latest report already pointed out the consequences of global warming for the major balance of the planet, especially in terms of access to water, population movements, conflict and civil war. Such studies need to be developed and systematized using a strict scientific framework. It is the only way to anticipate and address the tragedies in the making.

One of the ways of proceeding, and this is the third point I would like to focus on, is to implement prevention measures wherever possible and as soon as possible.

You are familiar with such measures. They concern firstly urban planning and the displacement of communities, who we know are in danger, as a preventive measure. At a time when the global population tends to be concentrated along coastlines, it would be dangerous to let cities develop there in an uncontrolled manner and consequently to put their future inhabitants in danger. Public authorities are directly responsible in this matter.

Prevention measures also mean the building, wherever possible, of systems enabling us to reduce the impact of natural disasters on the populations.

Flood-resistant buildings, flood protection dykes and drainage systems must be developed and increased. However, these systems are expensive and in many regions not always feasible, in particular here. We cannot encompass all the Pacific islands with dykes. That is why these solutions will not be enough, even if they have proved to be particularly useful, as large scale initiatives in the Netherlands have shown.

However, these are only emergency measures. They cannot offer a sustainable and satisfactory solution for the millions of people that global warming will drive from their homes over the next decades, even if we manage to maintain the fateful threshold of 2°C.

It is therefore necessary to give thought to the extensive development of the rules governing the functioning of our world, especially with regard to people displaced by climate, their status and their reception. This is the fourth focus area on which we need to work, and undoubtedly it is the most demanding.

The fact is that international law pertaining to this matter, mainly organized by the 1951 Geneva Convention, is today inappropriate. It is therefore important we think about its evolution and as such to define the points that pose a problem.

The first problem lies with the identification of causalities at stake in climate-related events. Climate crises are multi-faceted, and above all multi-factorial.

The decline of an ecosystem is a complex process often resulting from various factors and can have an extremely wide range of consequences, from a sanitary crisis to an armed conflict.

It is therefore extremely difficult to gain a unique understanding and above all, difficult to grasp each situation in a uniform way.

Moreover we have seen this in many current crises: the appropriation of resources, especially when insufficient, is one factor among others for the destabilization of a region, which generally is in addition to other ethnic, religious, economic and strategic factors.

The philosophy of a case-by-case assessment which in large part forms the structure of the Declaration of Geneva obviously creates a situation even more complicated.

Another difficulty posed by the status of an environmental refugee is down to the fact, and this is connected, that the climatic elements of a crisis are often difficult to notice and take on board with other categories designed more for an emergency situation. If the displacement of a population caused by a hurricane or tsunami is more or less managed in the same way as the displacement of a population due to war, the same cannot be

said for slow and complex movements such as rising sea levels, which unfortunately you all know too well.

At what point should we decide that life is endangered? At what point should we consider that exodus is legitimate?

We need to focus specifically on all these issues. Because these difficulties do not mean that a solution is not possible: they simply remind us that in order to be effective the solutions that need to be implemented must be given serious consideration in a multilateral setting. It is within the UN, and only the UN, that it will be possible to obtain a solution capable of being imposed on everyone.

Finally, the last difficulty I want to point out – and again one which can only be dealt with by the UN – concerns the compensation paid to the victims of climate disruption. I feel that such a mechanism is necessary, in particular in the light of the injustice I mentioned earlier and that the victims of this upheaval are rarely those responsible.

In this respect I am in favor of working towards, within the UN framework, setting up a specific compensation fund which could be supplemented by contributions based on the use or production of hydrocarbons. This is a topic on which I hope multilateral fora will study carefully.

I know I can count on you to encourage them, Mr. President, dear Anote Tong, as I can count on the representatives of the other countries here today which endure the same bleak prospects as the Republic of Kiribati.

Your voices and those of your people are essential in sounding the alarm regarding the tragedies announced, in warning those who can be warned, and in managing humanely, generously and responsibly those who cannot be averted. I know that together we will be able to convince our contemporaries.

Therein lies the great virtue of the issue which unites us today: to be able to reflect on climate change as a whole, in all its painful and brutal reality, and not only from a technical, distant and disembodied point of view.

This is one of the tragedies of this world, so focused on topical, urgent and dramatic news: the main issues at stake, which are the result of slow and complex mechanisms, so often escape our attention.

By superimposing the immediate crisis over the long-term crisis, the issue of climate refugees enables us to combine these two temporalities in one single approach. It forces us to take the issue of climate change for what it really is.

Not a secondary concern reserved for the privileged few, those who have no other issues to address. Not a distant prospect that we can put off until later.

But indeed a major crisis, which calls into question the way in which our world functions, jeopardizes its balance and calls for a global and coordinated solution.

It is a challenge which is undoubtedly the greatest of this century: to reconcile humanity with the environment so that every human-being has the right to live on a sustainable planet. So that we do not leave our children, countries and continents part of whose heritage has been destroyed. So that future generations have the chance to live not in this hostile world, but in a sustainable world.

I would like to believe that this is possible, as long as we show lucidity, determination and courage. As long as, as Francis Scott Fitzgerald wrote in one of his last writings, we are able to “see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise”.

Thank you.