

The Call from “Ueantebangota”, Tengaruru Re-thinking Kiribati

A. Introduction

1. We, the Kiribati Protestant Church, , met in *Ueantebangota*,¹ *Tengaruru* from the 22nd to the 27th of September 2011 to deliberate on the need to rethink who we are as I-Kiribati and the key aspects of our development as a nation (*Botanaomata*) in this century. the Diocese of Tarawa Roman Catholic Church, the Church of God
2. We met in the Spirit and Grace of God, with disquiet in our hearts for the present, and sadness for the past that could be lost, but with Hope for the future. We firmly believe that God our creator is just and compassionate, and has given us His Spirit to help us discern the means from our history and from the present, and to guide our course of action for our current concerns. It is with this hope, founded in God’s mercy and grace, that we make the following affirmations and calls.
3. The central affirmation and call of this statement are these: *God created us in His image and has given us the means to live a full and happy life; our call, therefore, is that the principle of “endless growth” should no longer drive our development; what ought to guide our development in this century, we firmly believe, is to know our limits and when “enough is enough”.*

B. Affirmations

Despite our differences as churches our deliberations brought us to recognise and acknowledge our shared Judeo-Christian heritage. To help us in our discussions and dialogue on our concerns, and consequently to implement the actions, we affirm:

1. that the foundation of our Christian faith is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; we further affirm that we are here today because of God’s grace, love and mercy;
2. that as every individual is sacred, each one of us – man, woman and child, - is made in the image of God and that through Christ we are no longer strangers to one another as we all children of God;
3. the invitation that we, as Churches, are to undertake a similar formation journey as the ancient Israelites did by looking at ourselves, our I-Kiribati society and the Pacific region;
4. the invitation for us as Churches to live and act, not in the ways of empire where “endless growth” is the principle of life, but in the ways of God’s dream for us where the principles of health, security (*Te Mauri*), peace (*Te Raoi*) and prosperity (*Te Tabomoa*) are our inspirations;
5. that to be free in Christ means that we are not to be held captive by memories of bitterness, resentment and hatred, and that we must answer hatred with love, violence with peace, resentment with generosity of spirit and conflict with reconciliation;

¹ This means *Lord of the Shrines*

6. that Christian hope is not merely about the longing for the next life, but fundamentally about being active in this world and taking responsibility and be accountable for the present and the future;
7. that governance means the managing of our affairs in a just and compassionate way which is more than making our systems and structures efficient and responsive; we further affirm that the purpose of governance is to serve the basic needs of our people and to ensure health, security (*Te Mauri*), peace (*Te Raoi*) and prosperity (*Te Tabomoa*);
8. that the land (*Aba*), ocean (*Marawa*) and sky (*Karawa*) and everything in and on them are God's gifts to us; we further affirm that we are entrusted with the responsibilities of stewardship (*Te Touati*) by God and our ancestors;
9. that self-sufficiency (*Te Toronibwai*) is the key to living a full and happy life as God intended. We further affirm that our traditional knowledge can provide incentives and employment to our people; and
10. that we endorse the Exodus Formation Framework (EFF) and the Re-thinking Oceania (RO) concept note as our base documents to help us rethink who we are and who our society is in this century.

C. Statement on concerns

Governance

1. Our governance today is lacking the three key principles in our Judeo-Christian heritage which are: consultation, participation and consent. Precisely because we are made in the divine image of God, we, at the same time, are gifted with the right for assent or refusal, and with the dignity of citizenship in this land (*Aba*) of Kiribati. Over the years of our independence, much social and economic development has happened, particularly in the areas of education, health, social services, commerce and industry.
2. At the same time, we observed the deterioration of our common life as a people. In particular, we note the increasing failure of our governance mechanisms for representation, consultation and participation of our people and their institutions on important decisions affecting our nation (*Botanaomata*). We also note with concern the narrowing down of governance to mere efficiency and responsiveness. While these are important, the primary purpose of governance is to ensure social justice in our nation (*Botanaomata*).
3. We, therefore call on the government, churches, and civil society organisations to:
 - a. rethink our understanding of governance and to capture its broader meaning which we strongly hold, that is to serve our people's needs, and to ensure health, security (*Te Mauri*), peace (*Te Raoi*) and prosperity (*Te Tabomoa*) in our land (*Aba*) and ocean (*Marawa*);
 - b. review the mechanisms for consultation and participation at all levels and to strengthen these to allow for meaningful ways in which the voice of our people can be heard in decision-making and policy formulation processes of Government (*Tautaeka*) and Church (*Ekaretia*);
 - c. review and strengthen the system and structure of representation to ensure equity, effective and qualitative representation of our people's issues and concerns in the Government (*Tautaeka*), Church (*Ekaretia*) and village (*Te Kawa*) in regards to basic needs, peace and justice, and development;

- d. take steps to significantly include the representation, consultation and participation of youth (*Roronrikirake*) and women (*Aine*) in decision-making processes in family (*Utu*) and village (*Te Kaawa*) issues, and in Government, Church and Civil Society Organisations policies.

Climate Change

1. We acknowledge that climate change (*Bibitakin Kanoan Boong*) and its effects is an issue of grave concern for us. It is having a drastic impact on our lives and relationships as individuals, families, villages and as a nation (*Botanaomata*). Our identity (*Aomatara*), our land (*Aba*), and our culture and traditions (*Kateira ao Anuara*) are under threat, and we are fearful for our future.
2. We take seriously our responsibility as stewards of the land (*Aba*) and ocean (*Marawa*); we hold these in trust for our children and their children. We humbly acknowledge that we ourselves contribute to the damage to our environment (*Otabanin*) and to climate change (*Bibitakin Kanoan Boong*) by our unsustainable lifestyles of “endless growth”. We ought to do more to help ourselves.
3. We note with serious concern the damage to our environment (*Otabanin*), particularly the lack of sanitation and hence the contamination of our fresh water sources and the security of our food supplies. We realise that our growing population adds additional stresses to our already scarce resources. We note our continual dependence on imported goods, the preference for these and the diluting interest in our own locally-produced goods. We also note the impacts that improper disposal of waste – such as plastics and non-perishable items - are having on our land (*Aba*), ocean (*Marawa*) and our environment (*Otabanin*).
4. We note with grave concern that there is general indifference in the health and cleanliness of our environment (*Otabanin*): our civic and religious buildings and surrounds; our villages (*Ara Kaawa*) and our homes. We must take pride in our God-given environment (*Otabanin*), repair our roads, and clean the compounds and surrounds of our state and religious institutions, our schools and our homes. We need to practice sustainable ways of fishing and farming, and must teach our youth to value these practices.
5. We, therefore call on the government, churches, and civil society organisations to:
 - a. create and enforce policies to protect our environment (*Otabanin*);
 - b. work together in implementing the actions that will address the climate change (*Bibitakin Kanoan Boong*) impacts;
 - c. raise awareness of the issues of climate change (*Bibitakin Kanoan Boong*) at all levels of society.

HIV and AIDS

1. We note the review of the Nadi Declaration highlights the lack of communication at all levels, the lack of follow-up to identify obstacles to implementation so that appropriate action can be taken. We are particularly concerned about the need to strengthen the mechanism for coordination at the national level, the partnerships that need to be strengthened and the need for a closer working relationship with those most affected and the Government.
2. We acknowledge that the National Strategy (date) is still being developed and a work plan has been developed by PIAF² to overcome stigma and discrimination. There is an urgent need to create a better understanding of the links between development problems such as Violence

² Pacific Islands AIDS Foundation

Against Women, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, education, human rights, climate change (*Bibitakin Kanoan Boong*) and HIV and AIDS.

3. We heard about the Report of the Pacific AIDS Commission Turning the Tide: An OPEN Response to HIV and AIDS in the Pacific.³ We are concerned about the limited time taken to discuss the issues raised, especially to generate ownership among all of the faith-based organisations in Kiribati, including youth (*Roronrikirake*) and women (*Aine*) groups.
4. We welcome the opportunity to hear the testimony of Mr. Buraua Itimwemwe and look forward to help overcome stigma and discrimination of positive people in Kiribati.

D. Statement on actions

We have affirmed the key values and have noted the various concerns. We now commit ourselves to implementing the outcomes of our discussions through the following actions. We commit ourselves to work together and to implement as much as we can the following actions within the next five (5) years. With our commitment we also trust and put our faith in God to guide us through.

Exodus Framework and Rethinking Oceania

1. In endorsing the EFF, we commit ourselves to an educational programme on the EFF to help us to re-think who we are, our development, and our nation (*Botanaomata*) in this century.
2. Conduct within the next 5 years, an educational programme among our churches on the EFF and the RO, in particular, the rethinking of Kiribati - our life as I-Kiribati people.
3. Design and implement a training of trainers on the EFF and the RO in 2012 among the Churches.

Governance

1. Translate and disseminate the outcomes of this workshop prior to elections through the media and the assistance of the participants.
2. Plan an open forum on the outcomes of this workshop with the newly-elected members of parliament.
3. Conduct an educational and awareness training programme on the responsibilities of the people in-between elections, particularly, in monitoring the implementation of the principle that the purpose of governance is to serve our people's basic needs, equity, justice and peace.
4. Ensure that youth representation in the government and the church addresses equity, and capacity building training in the form of leadership, consultation and representation is provided.
5. Take steps to include a representative(s) from the Churches on human rights committees.

Climate Change

1. Submit a proposal to the Kiribati National Council of Churches (KNCC) for a climate change (*Bibitakin Kanoan Boong*) ecumenical body/committee comprising participants from the workshop.
2. Develop and implement an exchange programme between our young people and those from within the region on climate-change awareness, education and action.

³ O for Ownership, P for Partnership, E for an Enabling and Empowering Environment and N for Networking, Other developments that need to be considered for follow-up work should include the UNICEF's funded five (5) year Strategy on HIV and AIDS for FBO³s in Fiji and the State of Pacific Youth report which was launched at the Pacific Islands Forum held in Auckland in September.

3. Implement projects on replacing the use of plastic bags with locally-produced, biodegradable bags and to separate compostable and non-compostable waste; seek funding for a waste decomposer.
4. Conduct a campaign to stop the use of plastic bags and other environmentally-harmful products, and to encourage the production, purchase and the use of locally-produced goods and the reuse of waste materials.
5. Take action on facilities for the collection of waste, and creating, enforcing and adhering to laws and policies on waste management, so that our people are encouraged to keep their homes and communities clean, and perpetrators are discouraged from littering our beautiful environment (*Otabanin*) through penalties such as fines.
6. Establish a partnership with the government to share experiences and best practices, and to identify areas where the churches can assist.
7. Raise awareness on the issues of climate change (*Bibitakin Kanoan Boong*) at all levels of Kiribati society, especially to incorporate action on climate change (*Bibitakin Kanoan Te Boong*) issues into the school curricula.
8. Conduct community awareness on climate change (*Bibitakin Kanoan Boong*) health-related issues and on our present lifestyle that is contributing to environmental impacts and to health problems.
9. Strengthen awareness and knowledge on traditional medicine, family planning, construction and navigation that will help with our sustainability and self-reliance.

HIV and AIDS

1. Study and implement among our churches a well coordinated programme on the Nadi Declaration outcomes and actions.
2. Request the PCC and the Kiribati Government Ministry of Health to liaise with the PIAF and other regional organisations and stakeholders working in HIV-related areas in Kiribati (UNAIDS, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, SPC, PIFS etc) to fund and conduct a workshop for the Kiribati FBOs to map out a more coordinated plan of action to address HIV and AIDS.
3. Translate the Nadi Declaration to the Kiribati language and other relevant materials such as the Report of the Pacific AIDS Commission, Turning the Tide: An OPEN Response to HIV and AIDS in the Pacific and the UNICEF five (5) year strategy on HIV/AIDS for Fiji FBOs.

E. Conclusion

We call on the Kiribati National Council of Churches, religious and faith-based organisations in Kiribati to coordinate the implementation of this Call. We commit ourselves to implement the *Ueantebangota, Tengaruru* Call within five years. We commit ourselves to coming together annually to see how far we have journeyed.

We commit ourselves to a new paradigm of rethinking Kiribati, acknowledging our complicity in the current way we live our lives, and our dependence on aid money, and we commit ourselves to formation in the ways of the Lord.

In concluding this statement, we acknowledge the hard work of the PCC and the hosting church KPC, and the support of the KNCC member churches, Rev. Dr. David Upp and the staff of Tangintebu Theological College for leading us in the Bible studies, the local parish – Ueantebangota - for providing the venue and the contributions of the government and NGO representatives.

Kam Raba

Ami Bau Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa

Ueantebangota, Tengaruru
South Tarawa
Kiribati
27th, September
2011