

National Statement By

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Kiribati**

Fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women

5 March 2009

United Nations Headquarters, New York

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**The Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between women and men including in the
context of HIV/AIDS.**

Chair,

I am honored to address the 53rd Commission on the Status of Women on behalf of my country Kiribati.

2. We support and align ourselves to the statement of the Pacific Islands Forum members on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men including in the context of HIV/AIDS.

3. Women continue to be the major providers of care in Kiribati society, this is partly because of our culture that women are the main nurturers in family units. Over time this role has become an expectation. Whilst there are men in our society that are willing to undertake the responsibility of care in the family, it is a fact that women still continue to carry out the bulk of care work in the home.

4. Kiribati is a small island nation of a little more than 90, 000 people (*and is ranked among least developed countries*). Our economy depends on our fishing, copra and seaweed industry and one of the major income source is remittances from migrant workers. The theme of this years Commission is pertinent to the nation of Kiribati, for a number of reasons. Kiribati has a very youthful population. In addition to this, we have a growing number of young men leaving our shores to work as seafarers on shipping vessels in the region and overseas.

5. In addition to this we also have a number of women taking up care-giving and nursing (*including other seasonal*) employment overseas. This shift in labour movement whilst positive for the economy in terms of remittances has implications for care in the home, as the women who are left back at home are expected to provide this care as well as carry out other reproductive roles such as fishing and agricultural work. Women who take up employment overseas end up caring for other families' young, old and sick as caregiver and nurses, whilst the care of family back in their home country is left with a mother, grandmother or other member of the family. This is not uncommon in the Pacific.

6. Men do play an important role in the care of the family, but like other Pacific societies women play an integral part of the care and the nurturing of the sick, the young and the old. Our society is based on a sense of community, our community is our family.

7. I turn now to the review theme of the Commission. There are three women members of parliament of which one holds the office of Vice President of the State. Out of the 13 Government Ministries, 6 women hold Permanent Secretaries (CEO) positions in important Ministries such as, Health, Education, Finance, Foreign

Affairs, Office of the President responsible for Civil Servants and the Ministry of Lands and Environment.

8. We acknowledge that there is still much Kiribati needs to do to support equal decision making at all levels, and we look forward to working in collaboration with regional and international organisations to advance these initiatives. However, we affirm that these initiatives must be carried out in consultation to ensure ownership at the national level.

9. Furthermore, through funding and technical assistance from Australia AID through the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and UNFPA, Kiribati (*amongst two other selected islands*) recently conducted a Survey on Gender Base Violence Against Women and Children (GBVAC). The findings of this survey is being finalised at both the national and regional level and we hope to use this findings to inform government policies. Accurate and dependable statistics is important for our work in eliminating violence against women and children.

10. I am also please to announce that in December 2008, the Government of Kiribati recruited a CEDAW Advisor with funding and technical assistance from UNIFEM. Both the Survey on Gender Base Violence Against Women and Children and the recruitment of a CEDAW Advisor was a strongly supported, national driven initiative by the Government of Kiribati.

11. With respect to the emerging financial crisis, Kiribati has taken the initiative to develop agricultural schemes to promote self reliance and cease dependence on imported foods. There will be implications for both men and women to share the responsibility of subsistence production.

12. We value this opportunity to exchange views with other countries, particular small island nations and look forward to further discussions around the theme of this session, the emerging theme and the review theme.

Thank you Chair.