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Universal Periodic Review

Joint Stakeholder Submission for the Review of Kiribati

A joint submission by:

RAK – Reitan Ainen KUC, Relief Society, RAB – Reitan Ainen Boretetanti, KRBA – Kometen Reitakiia Botaki n Aine, Irekenrao, Ueen te Makeke, AKIBE – Ainen Kiribati Iaon Betio, TTM – Tetoamatoa, KGGGA - Kiribati Girl Guides Association, KWTNA - Kiribati Women Teachers Network Association, MOWIA – Ministry of Women in Action, KWAVE – Kiribati Women And Violence Elimination, Dorcas, Nei Mom, Ueen Tebike, ABAB – Aia Botaki Ainen Butaritari, Nikabubutin Makin, Tetokanimarakei, Terunganaine, UKETI – Ueen Kirabun Eutan Tarawa Ieta, Ueen Benita, Ueen te Toaki, Ueen Abemama, Ueen Aranuka, Marewen Nonouti, Marewen Tabiteuea Meang, Ueen te Ueanikai, Reitan Nanoia Ainen Onotoa, Tanimwarutamu, Ainen Beru, Matangareia Ainen Tamana, Ngareia Ainen Arorae, Nei Baneawa, Nei Tiwiita, Ainen Teeraina and, Ueen te Bitati.

Executive Summary

1. Founded in 1968 as a Women's Affairs section within the Ministry of Health and Family Planning, the section was transferred between government ministries until 1982 when Government acknowledged the importance of women in development and formally established 'Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati (AMAK)' as a national Kiribati women's federation with a focus on coordination, research and training, formulation of development strategies and plans, establishment of networks and seeking of assistance for members locally and abroad. It thrived as a quasi-government organisation and with Government's nudging, went on to become a registered NGO in August 2011 under the 2002 Incorporated Society's Act. In 2018, with the support of the Kiribati Government, the Taiwan Province of China and the Australian Government, AMAK is now undergoing a state of reform focusing on constitutional review and development of organisational systems to ensure accountability and transparency for sustainability of the organisation into the future.
2. AMAK acknowledges Government's signatory to major UN and regional Conventions and frameworks including CEDAW, CRPD, CRC, Biodiversity and Climate Change, Pacific Platform among others and thanks the Government for its continued commitment to gender equality.
3. With members spanning 22 of the 23 inhabited islands of Kiribati, this joint submission brings together the views of AMAK national members and focuses on women issues relating to CEDAW articles 2, 14 and 17 and also on recommendations of the twenty first session of the Human Rights Council Working Group on the UPR 19-20 January 2015 in particular recommendations 7, 9, 21, 22, 29 and 40.

Issue 1: Enabling environment for gender mainstreaming

4. The amendment of the Kiribati constitution in 2013 enabled the establishment of the Ministry of Women Youth Sports and Social Affairs within which the Women's Development Division (WDD) sits, the national women's machinery. Mandated to coordinate and mainstream gender into all government development sectors, WDD has a huge responsibility to ensure that gender equality is incorporated in government processes, strategies and frameworks. While WDD has undertaken considerable work on development of the ESGBV policy and complementary 10 year National Action Plan (NAP), the Family Peace Act, the Shared Implementation Plan and the Gender Equality and Women's Development policy among others, there is a need to ensure that WDD is fully resourced to undertake the technical and physical workload required for the Government of Kiribati to fulfil its obligations to CEDAW.
5. WDD in 2019 is resourced with 7 permanent and 5 project officers, an increase from a mere 3 permanent and 3 project officers in 2013 when MWYSSA was first established. With daily business comprising responding to adhoc requests from stakeholders, participating in meetings, monitoring of programs, dialogues with development partners, planning and

development of policies and budgets, provision of technical input into sector ministry plans and strategies, writing up of national, regional and international reports, representation of the government at national, regional and international women's fora, WDD has been struggling since establishment of MWYSSA to meet their national, regional and international obligations notable in the recent finalisation and launch of the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy in 2019 (that had started in 2012) and, the late submissions of its CEDAW reports.

6. In 2013, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) with the Australian Government's support, undertook a gender stocktake study for Kiribati. The study reported that while there is strong political will and organisational culture and, considerable work has gone into changing and developing legal and constitutional frameworks, there is however limited technical capacity, financing and accountability mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in Kiribati.
7. Women on the outer islands (rural) are more marginalised to those on South Tarawa, the capital most urbanised island of Kiribati, because of their remoteness, limited infrastructure, services and opportunities. Two things that mobilised rural women into participating in development on the outer islands is the establishment of the Women Interest Worker (WIW) positions and women centres within Island Councils by Government in the 1980s. WIWs essentially provided the decentralised governments a focal officer responsible for women programs and activities while the centres provided a common platform for rural women to gather from their separate villages and churches to plan and decide as one, on their developments including contributing to Island Councils plans and activities. However, not all islands had centres built for women. Of the 23 national Island Councils, 7 Island Councils do not have women centres. One of the outcomes of a women's national general meeting held at AMAK June 2018 was the establishment of women centres on islands where there are not any and maintenance to existing centres as a second priority to their needs on the outer islands. Being a platform for them to meet neutrally, the centre's potential has expanded into a youth centre, a market and support centre for women on the outer islands.
8. The concept of gender is still being grasped by the people in Kiribati. Gender was a word hardly heard towards the late 21 century and even when AMAK was formally established in 1982 as a national women's machinery, gender was then generally mistaken as something concerning women only. This misunderstanding has seemed to continue into the 22nd century as further reiterated in the 2013 Gender Stocktake Study by SPC Appendix 3 (Barriers to gender mainstreaming) and the 2017 Strengthening Gender Considerations in Kiribati's National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Process relating to climate change and disaster risk management. In both reports, the following statements were noted: 'People think that 'gender' is only about women and; 'Domestic Violence is seen as an issue but not gender inequality'. The fact that there is limited local gender technical capacity and no local translation for 'gender' has probably contributed to this slow contextualising of the gender concept.

Recommendations:

9. Government to re-visit its Public Service Office scholarship priorities and consider re-locating gender as a top priority for scholars.
10. Government to establish gender focal officers within all line ministries and ensure that they have the gendered capacity to provide technical inputs and advice to sector plans, strategies, policies and budgets. Where gender focal officers lack the capacity, a schedule of gender training is developed and organised locally, regionally or electronically (internet) to enable the focal officers to understand gender and perform/contribute to the whole of government gender mainstreaming and CEDAW obligations.
11. Government to consider increasing more permanent and technical positions within WDD and to prioritise technical capacity building to individual WDD current permanent staff as part of the Government's in-service training to public servants locally, regionally or electronically.
12. Government to equally establish women centres at the remaining 7 Island Councils (Marakei, Teinainano Urban Council, Maiana, Nikunau, Banaba, Kiritimati and Tabuaeran) including maintenance of current women centres on the rest of the islands. Government to also consider establishment of a women's centre on the remote island of Kanton even though it does not have an island council.
13. Government to re-visit and formally strengthen the CEDAW committee to ensure that it is inclusive of women activists from civil society and the private sector, technical people from the different sectors, that it has a proper terms of reference based on CEDAW obligations and a working budget.
14. Government to re-visit the Kiribati National Human Rights Taskforce (KNHRT) established in 2014 to ensure its membership is inclusive of human rights activists from civil society and the private sector.
15. Government to ensure availability of a budget to support implementation of MWYSSA's 2019-2022 Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) Policy by January 2020.
16. Government to reconsider the GEWD's proposed implementation actions and budget for reconsideration of the proposed activity (number 19) budget on 'Improve women's awareness about gender equality and women's rights' to increase it to at least AUD100,000 to enable outreach to rural women and enactment of Recommendations 84.49, 84.65, 84.70, 84.75 of the HRC 29th session report of the Working Group to the UPR 13 April 2015.

Issue 2: Civil Society partnership and capacity building

17. The Government's KV20 provides a blueprint guide on development for the next 20 years ending 2036 aimed at unlocking the potential resources and facilitating the commitment and cooperation of all Ikiribati in development. Founded on four pillars on wealth, peace and security, infrastructure and governance, the KV20 acknowledges the importance of gender, youth, vulnerable groups, disability, equity and partnership as cross-cutting principles for successful achievement of this long-term plan. The KV20 also noted development of collaborative mechanisms for engaging various stakeholders to encourage a participatory approach during the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the KV20. Annex 1 of the KV20 shows its implementation plan and while civil society had been noted as important players/stakeholders in the successful achievement of the KV20, there were never any mention of them in the implementation plan except for faith based and community organisations.

18. Civil Society/NGOs in Kiribati are governed by the Incorporated Society Act assented by Government in 2002 however NGOs specifically faith-based organisations the Kiribati Red Cross, AMAK established in 1982 and the Kiribati Family Health Association (KFHA) established by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in 1985, Te Toa Matoa (Disabled People's Organisation) established in 1999, Kiribati Girl Guides Association (KGGA), Kiribati Scouts and the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSPK) had existed before the Act. Other existing NGOs (local and international) include the Kiribati Local Governments Association (KILGA), Kiribati Association of Non-Government Organisations (KANGO), Live & Learn and the newly (2019) established Kiribati Women & Children's Support Centre (KWCS). Reports and recommendations 9, 15, 21, 22, 29 and 40 of the HRC working group on the UPR 21st session 19-30 January 2015 all showed the need for NGOs to be formally acknowledged, supported and involved in all human rights activities and events. This included confirmation and security of their participation in the activities.

19. Government provides annual support funds to faith-based organisations only, amounting to \$500,000 every year. This amount is shared according to a formula based on equal and population share and comprises only churches that are recognised by Government or have got a congregation of at least 2% of the total most recent census population that are 18 years and older. This is also the number needed for a new church to register under the Incorporated Society's Act. While churches are acknowledged as important mediums for peace and development, other special interest civil societies such as AMAK, KFHA, Girl Guides, KILGA, Kiribati Scouts, KANGO, Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSPK), Live & Learn and the Kiribati Red Cross Association are also just as important as they represent specific sectors such as women, sexual & reproductive health, climate change and decentralised governance and are working on neutral programs aimed at addressing national issues that the Government is also trying to address on gender, reproductive, climate change and governance rights and adaptation.

Recommendations:

20. Government to acknowledge the importance of civil society to development in Kiribati and to provide annual funding support not only to faith-based organisations but to all civil society with support allocations to be based on the work individual civil societies are undertaking for the different sectors and marginalisation of target beneficiaries of the civil societies.
21. Government to prioritise funding support to women's NGOs, AMAK and KWCSC, as these are two NGOs that play a key role in gender equality advocacy and ensuring that Government are implementing their obligations to CEDAW. KWCSC is focused on providing counselling and support services to survivors of gender-based violence and also advocating on gender equality. AMAK on the other hand, is a national women's federation that focuses on women's empowerment on all other fronts aimed at raising women's awareness on their rights, gender equality concept, economic empowerment and leadership. The HRC working group on the UPR 21st session summary 19-30 January 2015 report recommendations 9, 15, 21, 22, 29, 40 are all in line with this recommendation.
22. Government to revisit for action, recommendations 66.81 and 66.83 of the HRC Working Group report on the UPR 15th session, Agenda Item 6 in support of NGO involvement in development of a national environment charter to determine roles and responsibilities to include civil society and to help address⁶ and inclusion of civil society, including human rights non-governmental organizations, in the follow-up to this review, especially in addressing gender discrimination and domestic violence.