

Hon. Kautu TENAUA – REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr Chairman

Among other ill-health associated with poor diet, Kiribati is indeed adversely affected, socially and economically by Non communicable diseases crisis, the number one Public Health issue in the country. This has been highlighted in the WHO's outcome report of the STEP's survey carried out in Kiribati (2004-2006). The survey indicated that NCDs Crisis in Kiribati had been directly related to unhealthy life styles; mainly the consumption of unhealthy food and to some extent inadequate physical activities.

The Survey showed 99.5% not eating the recommended daily serving of fruits and vegetables, 72% categorized as overweight or obese, 13%are hypertensive, 20% are diabetic (non-insulin dependent) and 25% have high blood cholesterol. And this has contributed to the increasing prevalence of NCDs nationwide.

We all agree that Healthy diets constitute the consumption of the recommended daily requirement of nutritious food. But locally produced fruits and vegetables if at all available are limited and inadequate due to the NATURAL infertile white coral sand, gravel and stones that make up the islands. Imported fruits and vegetables are limited and extremely expensive. Compounding the problem is the limited rainfall and frequent droughts inflicting the country. Climate change made worse the situation we are in. Now more frequent long spells of droughts and very unfamiliar weather patterns, associated with less rainfall. Sea level rise and greater seawater surges have resulted in devastating coastal erosion and seawater infringement of our fragile and limited water lens.

The Kiribati Government encourages local interventions in order to increase the production and consumption of local produce in an effort to be self-sufficient and with the hope to achieve affordable healthy lifestyle. But our sandy infertile soil demands innovative agricultural techniques. Assuming organic gardening being safe to our fragile environment, and the products nutritious for human consumption, though I stand for correction- the limiting factors are insufficient supply of compost, not to mention inadequate supply of freshwater vital for it to be viable and sustainable to address demand.

As part of the Government's multiple engagements and efforts to counter the increasing prevalence of NCDs the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Ministry of Education had developed the School Food Policy targeting the young population in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools. The Objective is for early intervention in controlling the daily salt intake, high calorie and fatty foods consumption. In the hope to contain the increasing prevalence and the rising cost associated with the management of NCDs and subsequent costly management of NCDs complications overwhelming our health services in the country.

In conclusion, we understand the nutritional constraints Kiribati people are in at present and the associated poor health resulting from such. We also understand and recognize the challenges limiting our options and efforts in addressing limited access to healthy diet. Acknowledging the political will of my Government, the support from developmental partners and the support of Kiribati community to eliminate hunger and malnutrition. The question is how far and how committed are we to address country's specific needs in order to make a change. On behalf of the Kiribati Government I would sincerely welcome positive future efforts that we all hope for – the practical, affordable and therefore sustainable interventions in addressing poor health associated with inadequate supply and the resultant inadequate consumption of nutritious food.

Thank you