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Topic: Lonely Environmental Refuge

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The mainstream of this paper, stresses on the impact of global climate change in Kiribati, from the perspective of the first nation to face the consequence of global climate change, and to be considered as environmental refuge. However, the main question of this research will focus on one underlying dimension which is probably the most controversial issue throughout humanitarian history. Nonetheless, the research question includes; how global climate affect people in the Republic of Kiribati? This research question can therefore be conceived as a pure science question but since scientific theories fail to prove the fact that global climate change is a major challenge to small nation-states such as the Republic of Kiribati, Therefore, applying logic reasoning which are based on history and sociology studies are suitable to prove the fact of this phenomenon (Maryanne Loughry, 2007)

It is believed that, global climate change is already occurring at a much faster rate than in the recorded historical past and human activity is responsible for much of this change. In this sense, it can be seen nowadays that the Republic of Kiribati, has been involved for many years in the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change UNFCC¹ and KP², in order to call for climate justice to industrialized nations such as Australia, the United States of America and China. Indeed the participation of the Republic of Kiribati in these international regimes, seems to me as an effective way in resolving this global issue, since I recently realized that, tackling of complexity problems through collaboration under international regimes particularly climate change is far better than solving on your own.

Due with the inability of industrialized global leaders to join hands together with future disappearing nation states to get over climate change, this proposition is no longer effective anymore, therefore the government of the Republic of Kiribati together with other future disappearing nations have to find other ways toward their survival. The best alternative option for our government however, is to open productive dialogue with other head of state within the Pacific region like Australia and New Zealand to open a working scheme recruitment for the citizens of Kiribati and allow them to get their citizenship in their respective countries. This scheme is a prominent approach in avoiding more near problems of climate change to Kiribati. If the agreement reaches its clear-cut goals, the people of Kiribati will be able to survive contentedly.

In reality, the people of the Republic of Kiribati rely much on subsistence fishing and simple agriculture. In the case of climate change, the rising sea level will cause more erosion and will urge those who live at coast lines to protect their homes with seawall. Seawalls require more aggregate mining which will destroy the reef ecosystem. Most people on the Capital South Tarawa who cannot afford fishing nets and boats rely on seashells from the lagoon. An increase in the number of seawalls means more digging in the lagoon platform destroying the habitat for shellfish. This is a very serious threat to the livelihood of low-income families (Tong Anote, 2009).

The climate change will alter the distribution and quality of natural resources such as fresh water, arable land, coastal territory, and marine resources. Some researchers have

¹ UNFCC is stand for United Nation framework on Climate Change

² KP represents Kyoto Protocol

speculated that these changes could cause or prolong armed conflict. Indeed, the general link between the environment and armed conflict is well established and accepted by the Security Council as evidenced by its work in the thematic areas of natural resources and conflict; and energy security and climate (Takeke Rikiaua, 2007). However, climate change is not a problem waiting for its profound solution. It is an environmental, cultural and political phenomenon which is reshaping the way we think about ourselves and humanity's place on earth. (Mike Hulme, 2004). In addition, it also argues that human are unique species, we have the power to create intolerable conditions for the majority of our decedents (Michael, Barnett & Raymond Duvall, 2005).

Te Uekera³ reports that there are also cases with milk-fish ponds drying up due to evaporation. One milk-fish pond⁴ on Nikunau Island in Southern Kiribati was drying up. Nikunau is one of the southern islands in the Gilbert group that lies 473.25 km south east of Tarawa, the capital of Kiribati. Its nearest neighbor is Beru lying 51.41 km west of it. Nikunau is one of the islands that do not have a lagoon and therefore the milk-fish pond is the only alternative fishing ground, especially during stormy weather when it is difficult to fish in the open sea. If the pond continues to dry up, the islanders surely have no more source of protein. In Kiribati fish is the part of the main meal, and it is a threat to the health and livelihood of people if there is no fish. There have been reports this year from the islands of Butaritari and Tabiteuea about coastal flooding. This flooding has never been experienced before and it is critical since sea-water is flowing in the in-land natural ponds. The increase in salinity of these ponds will destroy the entire plantation. The nearby villages will be severely affected not to mention their underground water as well.

Furthermore, subsistence agriculture on small islands is threatened by rising sea levels, which can increase the frequency of coastal flooding. Rising sea levels can also leave salt deposits in the soil and contaminate groundwater supply, both of which have adverse effects on agriculture. Climate change is also likely to lead to more frequent and more intense periods of drought in some regions. Agricultural crops could become less resilient than usual to adverse weather extreme conditions, making dependence on agriculture insecure, for both subsistence and economic activities. And, in the case of the Island of Tabiteuea, the villagers who lived near the pond urge those who own prosperity in this area but live in distant villages to come and assist in building a seawall to stop sea-water from coming in. They suggest that if they failed to give help their lands and plantation will be taken away from them. Land disputes are always a very serious issue in Kiribati. Land dispute is serious since we do not have a vast area of land...each land portion owned by families are being handed over from generation to generation. Fighting over land could lead to devastating results. Therefore, Kiribati people care so much about the land that has been inherited from their ancestors and that is why they cherish it too much. Hence losing it will lead to a distressing and devastating situation to the people of the Republic of Kiribati

³ Te Uekera is the Government Weekly Newspaper in Kiribati

⁴ Milk fish pond is an interior pool for milk fish which is common in Kiribati.

According to the former President of Kiribati Teburoro Tito, “without a territory and people to govern, without resources to distribute and resources to trade, there is no state...”. Our marine resources and enormous Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ),⁵ from which a big percentage of it is our gift to the world will no longer be under our jurisdiction and control anymore. There would be no more legal right as a state to claim something in the name of our country. Our right as free citizens in egalitarian state and self-resilient culture will no longer be recognized. This is a threat to our existence as human beings belonging to this earth, however international community has to help us in order to preserve our language, culture and identity as a group of people different in their own but share equal rights with every other human being.

The major argument that underlines this paper is that, international community jurisdiction in international arena would be able to resolve global environmental issue or not. Kiribati as a nation had been threatened by climate change. Changes in water availability threaten natural areas and force rural poor to resettle and create uninhabitable small atolls which were once full of myths and legends. There would be no more ownership, no future and apparently no reason for existence. Kiribati is a very small country, vulnerable and incapable of defending her boundaries and specifically its citizens from the security implications of climate change. With the decrease in productivity due to the negative impacts of climate change we need a collective effort from neighbouring states to appeal to the rest of the world for an urgent attention of devising measures to safeguard our future from any threat imposed onto us by this scenario.

⁵ EEZ stands for Exclusive Economic Zone

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