



Human Rights Council

Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Republic of Kiribati

8th Session

Joint stakeholders' submission:

**Franciscans International (FI)
Marist Foundation for International Solidarity (FMSI)
Marist Oceania Solidarity Commission (MOSC)**

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I. Introduction

1. This report focuses on the right of the child to education and the numerous challenges faced by Kiribati's education system. Children under 18 compose 47% of Kiribati's total population, thus making their right to education a prime focus of attention in their development.¹

2. Kiribati's Ministry of Education receives the largest portion of total government budget every year. In 2008 this totaled USD 20 million: 50% goes to basic education level but 96% of this sum goes to costs of teachers alone. A minimal 4% is allocated for provisions of resources.²

3. Any consideration of current and future generations' education must be considered along with the vulnerability of the nation's land mass – a series of 33 low-lying atolls or islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean – due to climate change. It is anticipated that Kiribati would be among the first countries in which land territory will disappear due to global climate change, as early as 2050.³

4. This environmental threat forces the Government to think beyond existing provisions of education towards steps that cater for environmental refugees and migrations to neighboring countries. For this reason alone it would seem prudent to ensure all children reach adequate levels of English language and training in professional or vocational skills while at school since most living and working opportunities in neighboring countries require English language skills.

Scope of international obligations

5. The Democratic Republic of Kiribati became a member state to the United Nations on 14 September 1999. Kiribati has only ratified two treaties, namely the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1995 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2004.⁴ The Government should consider ratification of other core human rights treaties, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

6. Kiribati's implementation of the CRC is still pending on effective incorporation of the provisions into domestic legislation.⁵ Despite earlier commitments to lift reservations for this Convention, the Government has not yet lifted its reservation to articles 24 (b, c, d, e and f), 26 and article 28 (b, c and d).

7. The Government has established the Kiribati National Advisory Committee on Children (KNACC) to oversee the implementation of the CRC.⁶ This Committee has faced a number of financial and human resources limitations in the past.⁷ The Government needs to ensure it is adequately resourced so as to carry out its work effectively.

¹ Kiribati- A situation analysis of children, women and youth, Government of Kiribati with UNICEF assistance, 2005, http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Kiribati_Sitan.pdf

² Kiribati National Education Summit Outcomes- Education Sector Strategic Plan 2008, p 6.

³ Statement by H.E. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati, General Debate of the 63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 25 September 2008; http://www.un.org/ga/63/generaldebate/pdf/kiribati_en.pdf

⁴ Ratified in (1995) and (YEAR) respectively

⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/KIR/CO/1, par. 19 (2006)

⁶ In 2006, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recommended Kiribati takes all necessary measures to ensure that KNACC can pro-actively perform its role in coordinating and implementing rights of the child and that it be provided with sufficient human and financial resources to do so, UN Doc. CRC/C/KIR/CO/1, par. 10 (2006)

⁷ Kiribati-UNICEF Situation Analysis, 2005, p 44

8. Kiribati has not extended any invitations to Special Procedures, neither has it received any open requests for visits. A greater involvement of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the South Pacific Region, through the provision of technical assistance on human rights implementation, would greatly enhance Kiribati's performance.

Constitutional and legislative framework

9. The Constitution for the Democratic Republic of Kiribati protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens, including the protection of the right to life, of personal liberty, of freedom of conscience and expression, protection from inhumane treatment, and protection from discrimination on the grounds of race, place of origin, disability, colour or creed.

Policy measures

10. Education of the child in Kiribati is compulsory and free for primary education (years 6-11) and junior secondary (years 12-15). The Government is the sole provider of education for primary and junior secondary students. Government and Church schools provide education at Senior Secondary School level (years 15-18) to those selected for further education, subject to payment of fees.⁸

11. The Government's commitment to provide education for all children has been re-affirmed in the Ministry of Education's Strategic Plan for 2008-2011, approved by the Cabinet in July 2008.⁹ The Government has committed to six clear goals: delivering a high quality, coherent and relevant curriculum; providing a conducive teaching and learning environment for teachers and students; developing a competent and effective school education work force; strengthening the Ministry's policy framework and planning systems; strengthening the legislative and regulatory framework for managing schools; and consolidating partnerships with stakeholders.¹⁰

12. At the Kiribati National Education Summit in January 2008, the Ministry of Education (MoE) presented its assessment of the current situation of education in the country. While clearly showing the Government's strong desire to promote the best opportunities for its children, the MoE pointed to several areas of concern.¹¹

II. Promotion of the Right to Education

Quality and Scope of Education

13. Despite Kiribati's generous education budget, the quality of education is reportedly low by regional standards.¹² Key concerns include the narrowness of the school curriculum, the low level of attainment by many students and the need for the curriculum to be broadened to prepare all graduates find productive work once they leave school, whether it be locally or overseas. It

⁸ Government run Senior Secondary schools receive considerably more funding per head than Church schools that receive Government financial assistance through fee subsidies and grants. School fees in Government schools are much lower than Church run schools. Kiribati National Education Summit Outcomes – Education Sector Strategic Plan 2008 – p 6

⁹ This Strategic Plan was the outcome of a major forum in January 2008: 'The Kiribati National Education Summit'. The theme was "A quality and balanced education for all: our future".

¹⁰ Kiribati National Education Summit Outcome- Education Sector Strategic Plan 2008, p 11.

¹¹ Among these concerns were the notable lack of adherence to Education laws, including enforcement of the compulsory education provision; a lack of established policies related to educational issues; a very high percentage of children attend schools in the urban areas causing overcrowding in these schools and low numbers in the outer islands; and the irrelevancy of the curriculum for many where it does not encourage the development of vocational and technical skills. These issues have resulted in high numbers of school 'drop-outs'.

¹² AusAID Annual Program Performance Report for Kiribati, 2007-08, p 12

is noted that there is a very limited number of job opportunities for young adults in Kiribati. Furthermore, poor quality of school infrastructure, as well as difficulty of access to schools, significantly affect the education of children in the outer islands.

14. Kiribati's MoE has identified that the curriculum used in schools has not been reviewed for a long time, that it focuses on narrow academic pathways linked to traditional white collar jobs and does not encourage vocational and technical skills.¹³ Young people who perform poorly or are disinterested in school are likely to drop out, while parents with limited cash resources who cannot see the relevance of formal education for their children's future are likely to withdraw them from school.¹⁴

15. Moreover, Church Schools have highlighted that the curriculum developed by the MoE was unbalanced, and were particularly concerned about the lack of social, emotional and moral education and the lack of opportunities for the majority of students who cannot successfully pursue the narrow academic pathway.¹⁵

16. It is apparent, therefore, that a full-scale and comprehensive overhaul of the school curriculum, particularly at secondary level, is absolutely necessary. Curriculum purpose and content need to be reformulated to ensure that students are well prepared to take their place in society as contributing adults and are well equipped for the world of work—whether locally as artisans, fishers, subsistence farmers, casual workers, government employees, or overseas.

Compulsory Education

17. Whilst enrolments at primary levels seem to be satisfactory, there is a real concern that enrolments both at Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS) levels fall far short of the actual population of children in those age groups.

18. In 2006 just under 28,000 students were enrolled in 130 schools with 1,318 teachers. Total enrolment rose by less than 2% during 2003–2006 - less than half the rate of population growth. Junior secondary school enrolment, the crucial pre-training stage, fell 9%, mainly in the urban schools. The net enrolment ratio at primary level was 96%; junior secondary, 79%; and senior secondary, 34%. There were slightly more boys than girls in primary schools, but girls significantly outnumbered boys at both secondary levels.¹⁶ The irrelevancy of the curriculum is a major contributor to these low enrolment levels.

19. Furthermore, education is not seen as a priority by all parents or guardians and it leads to loss of opportunity for the child's development. A significant number of children live with their guardians. Some guardians do not always meet their responsibility of ensuring the child attends school and, if separated by large distances, parents have limited opportunity to intervene. Similarly, parents allow their children to quit school early either to work or to stay at home.¹⁷

20 The decision of parents or guardians not to enforce school attendance for their children can be influenced by their not being aware of their responsibilities, or a lack of awareness of the importance of education, or money for school fees being spent on other purposes. We urge the Government to take steps to enforce its policy of compulsory education, by for example,

¹³ Kiribati National Education Summit Outcomes – Education Sector Strategic Plan 2008 – pp 5,6

¹⁴ The State of Pacific Youth Report, UNICEF, 2005, p 4

¹⁵ Kiribati National Education Summit, January 2008 – p 6

¹⁶ Kiribati Social and Economic Report 2008, Asian Development Bank, p 5

¹⁷ Priorities of the People: Hardship in Kiribati, Asian Development bank, 2007, p 13

establishing a system of family liaison officers to help families understand and carry out their responsibilities.

Children with Disabilities

21. Children with disabilities are not well catered for, especially in remote areas.¹⁸ The only school in the country that caters for children with disabilities or special learning needs is on South Tarawa, which is supported by the Red Cross.¹⁹ The lack of adequate facilities for these children reflects their lack of attendance at school. The Government must review its priorities in regards to providing access to education for children with disabilities.

Human Rights Education

22. Many parents are not fully aware of their responsibilities for their children under the Convention. Human Rights Education constitutes an essential contribution to the long-term promotion of human rights in a country and, in this situation, of parents knowing what their responsibilities are with respect to their children.

23. An extensive education and awareness-raising program by the Government would better inform its citizens of their rights and the rights of others, especially those of children. As part of its obligations under the CRC, Kiribati should take steps to inform right-holders, parents and other stakeholders of their rights and obligations under the Convention.

Quality of Teachers and Working Conditions

24. Whilst efforts have been made to improve the number of fully trained teachers in all schools, this goal has not yet been reached. There continues to be many untrained teachers working in schools, which affects the overall quality of education.

25. Kiribati has one Teachers' College (KTC) for training and upgrading the teaching profession. The limited facilities available for the preparation and training of teachers has an impact on the overall functioning of the education system. The MoE has raised the specific concern that there are not enough qualified teachers for higher levels, especially in English, Maths and Natural Sciences and that there is weak support for continued training of teachers at all levels.²⁰

26. An important issue for KTC and the school system is the decline in English language skills. Classes are taught in English in the school system. KTC was able to recruit only 18 of a possible 20 student teachers in 2007 because of failures by prospective entrants of the English²¹ language test.²²

27. Whilst the curriculum is to be overhauled to ensure it is relevant and appropriate, the Government must also upgrade the conditions of the schools and make appropriate finances available for this to be done. According to the Kiribati Social and Economic Report (2008) in relation to the working conditions for teachers, "about 68% of schools have an office for the head teacher, but only one in five of these are of the required size and are in good condition. A third of all schools have staff rooms (66% of these are adequate in size) and 38% of schools

¹⁸ In 2006 the CRC noted the concern that schooling is not possible for children with disabilities due to the lack of available resources and recommends to the Government to train teachers to educate children with disabilities within regular schools. CRC/C/KIR/CO/1, p 8

¹⁹ Kiribati-UNICEF situation Analysis, 2005, p 41

²⁰ Kiribati National Education Summit Outcomes – Education Sector Strategic Plan 2008 – pp 5,6

²¹ Kiribati and English are the national languages of Kiribati.

²² Source: Kiribati Social and Economic Report 2008 – Asia Development Bank, p 60.

have libraries, but only 1% of the latter are of the recommended size. Forty-three percent of schools have storerooms. Most tellingly, only 20% of students and 2% of teachers are provided with adequate school furniture (tables, chairs, desks, cupboards, and blackboards). Raising literacy and numeracy standards in these conditions is a daunting task.”²³ Unless the working conditions for teachers are satisfactory, despite all their efforts, the delivery of the curriculum and its outcomes will be substandard.

III. Recommendations

1. Sign and ratify core international human rights treaties, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
2. Withdraw the reservations to articles 24 b, c, d, e and f, 26 and 28 b, c and d of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
3. The Government to strengthen its support for the Kiribati National Advisory Committee on Children (KNACC) as the body in charge of implementing the CRC. All measures must be taken to ensure this body has the financial and human means necessary to implement its programs.
4. Issue a standing invitation for Special Procedures to visit the country, with particular emphasis on a future visit by the Special Rapporteur on Education.
5. Allocate sufficient resources and Overseas Aid money to fully implement the 6 goals of the Ministry of Education’s Strategic Plan 2008-2011 within the Plan’s time frame.²⁴
6. Ensure that the secondary school curriculum caters for all children, including general and vocational education to prepare students for entry into the workforce, and to do this in consultation with all stakeholders.
7. Enforce its law of compulsory education for all children of school age with the help of school–family liaison officers, or the like.
8. Pursue efforts to provide equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities, and take measures to train teachers to educate children with disabilities within regular schools.
9. Take greater steps in promoting human rights education by making known to all citizens their rights as in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights; and introducing awareness programs on the Rights of the Child in the school curriculum.
10. Make every effort to train and employ fully qualified teachers for all the schools, ensuring the provision of sufficient resources for all schools and teachers, which in turn will enhance the education outcomes of the students.

²³ Kiribati Social and Economic Report 2008, Asian Development Bank, p 60

²⁴ The six goals education goals of the Government are: (1) delivering a high quality, coherent and relevant curriculum; (2) providing a conducive teaching and learning environment for teachers and students; (3) developing a competent and effective school education work force; (4) strengthening the Ministry’s policy framework and planning systems; (5) strengthening the legislative and regulatory framework for managing schools; and (6) consolidating partnerships with stakeholders.