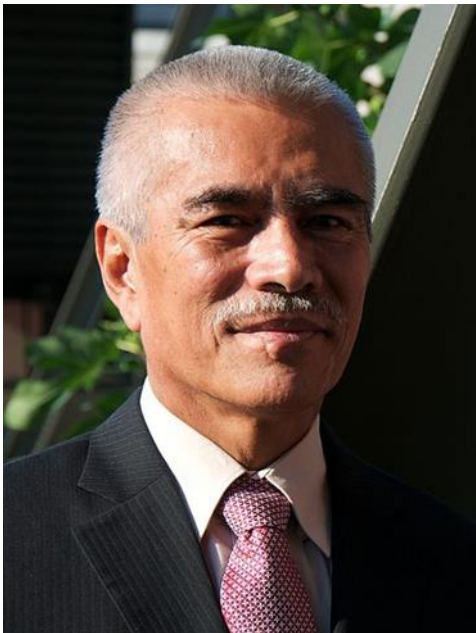


Thursday, 8 March 2018 | 12.30pm | LT20

Special Seminar hosted by A/P Edward Webb

2018: SINGAPORE'S YEAR OF CLIMATE ACTION



By Anote Tong

Former President of the Republic of Kiribati

Former President Anote Tong of Kiribati led his country for 13 years (2003 – 2016) and has become a respected global leader for climate action around the world.

Kiribati has about as much land as Singapore, split into 33 islands spread across an ocean area the size of India! The country is 99.98% ocean and as such Kiribati is experiencing the future of our climate, our coastlines and our oceans TODAY. Singapore's geography, like Kiribati's, makes it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise but we might also hold the technical and financial resources suited to lead a response in search of a more sustainable future – a response that can also represent a huge opportunity for future growth. It is true that even under current warming scenarios, we will need new innovations in nearly all areas of modern coastal and urban design, as well as in the effective assessment and insurance of risks for which no reliable models apply. These are challenges we must address, and the cost of doing so will never be as low as it is now.

President Tong is a self-proclaimed “rational radical” raising awareness for the greatest moral and economic challenge facing humanity today. While in leadership President Tong expressed the climate crisis in terms of national sovereignty, taking visionary action to secure the long-term well-being of his people. As a Distinguished Fellow at Conservation International, President Tong has continued his visionary work to protect the one blue home we all share.

Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, winner of the Sunhak Peace Prize, 2012 Hilary Laureate and Distinguished Fellow of Conservation International, His Excellency Anote Tong is a world-renowned leader in the battle against climate change and for ocean conservation.

During his three terms as President of the Republic of Kiribati, he was forced to confront an extraordinary challenge and bleak, all but unthinkable future for his compatriots. He believes Kiribati is quickly disappearing beneath the waves due to climate change, and the entire population may need to resettle – not as climate change refugees, but as citizens who migrate on merit and with dignity. “To plan for the day when you no longer have a country is indeed painful, but I think we have to do that.”

Nevertheless, despite and perhaps because of this vast and inevitable task, Tong was able to achieve a great deal during the 13 years he spent in office. Under his leadership, the government of Kiribati created the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, a 150,000 square-mile UNESCO World Heritage site, off limits to fishing and extractive industry. It is, he says, more than just a richly diverse gift to humanity from the people of Kiribati; it is intended to serve as an inspiration to the international community. Initiatives such as this one, typical of Tong's vision and his ability to balance political reality with humanitarian and ecological idealism, have earned him the Peter Benchley Ocean Award from the Blue Frontier Campaign.

He has also been awarded an honorary Doctorate in Engineering from the National Pukyong University in South Korea to add to his BSc from Canterbury University and his Master's in Economics from the LSE.

